
An Anthology of
STORIES
from the
SOUTHERN REVIEW

Edited by
CLEANTH BROOKS
and
ROBERT PENN WARREN

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To the memory of

MARCUS MANLEY WILKERSON

Director of the Louisiana State University Press 1935-53
and stanch friend of *The Southern Review*
who, with the editors, conceived this book

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Thanks are also due to the following authors for granting permission to include their stories in this collection: Manson Radford, for "Wm. Crane"; Howell Vines, for "The Ginsing Gatherers"; Gene Albrizio, for "The Bereft"; Andrew Nelson Lytle, for "Jericho, Jericho, Jericho"; and P. M. Pasinetti, for "Family History."

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INTRODUCTION

THE BEGINNING of the *Southern Review* was casual, sudden, and in so far as the future editors were concerned, quite unexpected.

On a bright Sunday afternoon in late February, 1935, the President of the Louisiana State University drove up to the door of Robert Penn Warren's residence on the outskirts of Baton Rouge and asked him, his wife, and a guest, Albert Erskine, to go for a drive. While the official black Cadillac crunched the gravel of the back roads, President James Monroe Smith revealed the motive of his invitation. Was it possible, he wanted to know, to have a good literary and critical quarterly at the university. Yes, was the answer he got—yes, if you paid a fair rate for contributions, gave writers decent company between the covers, and concentrated editorial authority sufficiently for the magazine to have its own distinctive character and quality. There was one more stipulation: that quality must not be diluted or contravened by the interference of academic committees or officials. How much would it cost? Toward \$10,000 a year.

After a few minutes of meditation, President Smith suggested that Erskine and Warren confer with Cleanth Brooks, then a member of the university English department, and with Charles W. Pipkin, Dean of the Graduate School, and prepare a statement. If the statement came in the next day, he would, he said, sign an authorization for the project.

That evening, Brooks, Pipkin, Erskine, and Warren drew up a plan for a quarterly, and the next day President Smith, as good as his word, signed the authorization. He hoped that a first number might be off the press as early as June. Actually the first number appeared in July, 1935. By that time the editors had agreed upon a name: the quarterly was to be called the *Southern Review*.

There was some background for the conversation in the official Cadillac. For a year or two before, Louisiana State University had contributed to the support of the *Southwest Review*, which was

published in Dallas, Texas, by the Southern Methodist University. Before this collaboration between Louisiana State University and the Texas neighbor, the magazine had had, under the editorship of J. H. McGinnis and Henry Nash Smith, a very distinctive character as an expression of the cultural interests peculiar to the Southwest. But under the new arrangement the policy of the magazine was in the hands of a rather large and heterogeneous editorial board drawn from both universities, and a certain amount of drift and confusion was inevitable. This drift and confusion was not enough to impair the basic quality and change the basic direction of the *Southwest Review*, but it took no prophet to see that if the situation prevailed very long, the magazine would lose its old virtues without acquiring new ones. Pipkin, Brooks, and Warren, as members of the joint editorial board, were convinced of this, and so were the Texas editors from the old regime. All members of the board who had any real interest in the project felt that the personally agreeable, but theoretically uneasy, collaboration would eventually reduce the magazine to an academic hodgepodge.

The *Southern Review* was founded with Charles W. Pipkin as editor, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren as managing editors, and Albert Erskine as business manager. Pipkin was a political scientist, and his dearest concern was, naturally, with public affairs. Brooks and Warren were teachers of English, and their chief concern was with literature. But there was never any real division of function among the four members of the staff. Erskine, though business manager, was an instructor in English and had as much to do with the editorial side of the magazine as anyone else. Every member of the staff read every item that could be seriously considered for publication, and by and large, all decisions were joint decisions. There were, of course, disagreements on matters of taste and policy, but the disagreements worked, on the whole, to keep the atmosphere of the office brisk and healthy during the seven years of the life of the magazine.

During that period, there were only two changes in the organization of the magazine. When Erskine went East, in November, 1940, to begin his career as a publisher, John Ellis Palmer, who was later to become the editor of the *Sewanee Review*, succeeded him, but with the title of managing editor, and Brooks and Warren were

given the title of editors. Pipkin's death occurred in the summer of 1941, and no third editor was named.

The *Southern Review* was extremely fortunate in the office secretaries who served it through its seven years. They were, in succession, Bessie Barnett, Mae Swallow, Jean Stafford, and Frances Stewart.

It must be granted that when the editors began the magazine they did so with some fear of political interference. In the atmosphere of the Louisiana of that time, the apprehension was real. The editors agreed that if any interference came they would resign. Their resolution was not put to the test. There was never any interference, on either academic or political grounds.

The name of the *Southern Review* was an expression, certainly, of the regional and sectional piety of the editors, but the editors hoped that that piety was somewhat different from the chauvinistic and uninstructed variety. They wanted the magazine to make some contribution to the cultural life of its region, and they were youthfully ambitious enough to want it to become a kind of focus for that life. But they felt that a regional piety that pretended to be more than shallow or sentimental demanded that they relate Southern problems and Southern literature to the world outside the South. A problem in economics in the South could not be dissociated from the economic problems of the rest of the world, and a Southern poet could not be considered without some awareness of the broad tradition of poetry and some awareness of the contemporary manifestations in, for example, France or England.

Most of all, however, the editors felt that they could best serve their region by insisting on the highest possible standards of excellence for the magazine itself. The phrase "highest possible" is a tricky thing here. What is "possible" for any magazine is what is actually available, from issue to issue, for its pages. And what is "highest" is what the editors feel to be highest. So, in a fashion, a magazine is at the uncertain mercy of the morning mail delivery and the taste of its editors.

In any case, the editors tried to choose from the available material with as much discernment as possible, without reference to the "Southern-ness" of the subject matter or the birth certificate of the author. Once, after the magazine had been operating for

several years, the editors, out of mere curiosity, did make a check on the local origins of their contributors. About 51 per cent were Southern. (A great many were not even American—Bonamy Dobrée, F. R. Leavis, Mario Praz, L. C. Knights, to mention only a few.) But the word *Southern* is, in itself, not too clear. Is Oklahoma, or Kentucky, Southern? It is hard to say.

As the editors did not inspect the birth certificate of an author, so they tried not to inspect the reputation. Despite awe and human frailty, they tried not to let the greatness of a name sway their judgment. Work by Nobel prize winners was, on occasion, rejected, and work by college sophomores was published. There were, of course, many contributions by then illustrious and still illustrious writers—Mark Van Doren, T. S. Eliot, Herbert Agar, W. H. Auden, Wallace Stevens, John Crowe Ransom, Aldous Huxley, Allen Tate, Katherine Anne Porter, Ford Madox Ford, Kenneth Burke, and Caroline Gordon. But there was also very early work by writers who have since those days made their mark in our time—Eudora Welty, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, Peter Taylor, Mary McCarthy, Nelson Algren, and R. P. Blackmur. And naturally, since many contributors were very young, and since the editors did make a consistent effort to get work from the young, some of the names that appear in the magazine are of people who have long since found vocation elsewhere than in writing. But they, too, have a place in the story, and in this collection.

It is only natural that when an affinity is discovered between a magazine and a writer the work of that writer will appear there rather often. It was to the great good fortune of the *Southern Review* that certain writers did discover such an affinity. To comment on fiction only, for that is the concern of this volume, Katherine Anne Porter published in the *Southern Review* three novelettes—titles that appear among her best-known work, "Old Mortality," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and "The Leaning Tower"—and two short stories; Eudora Welty* published seven stories; and Peter Taylor published three. At that time Miss Porter was already entering into her fame, but Miss Welty and Mr. Taylor were at the threshold of

* Some years ago the editors of the *Southern Review* observed with mildly cynical amusement that a well-known magazine had greeted Miss Welty as its "discovery." Miss Welty scarcely needed to be discovered by the *Southern Review* or any other magazine. Her talent was luminous enough; but her seven *Southern Review* stories preceded her "discovery."

their careers, Miss Welty a young lady living in Jackson, Mississippi, and Mr. Taylor a student in college. There were, of course, other writers who published with some regularity in the *Southern Review*. But since no writer is exhibited more than once in the present volume, this volume will indicate the range rather than the concentration of the fiction in the magazine.

What did the *Southern Review* cost? For the *Southern Review*, like all quarterlies, ran at a deficit. There was the cost of contributions, a cent and a half a word for prose, and thirty-five cents a line for verse. This, for a quarterly of some two hundred pages an issue, ran to approximately \$1,200 a year. The print-shop bill, in those far-off times, was not what it would be today but even then amounted to almost as much per issue as the payment of contributors. The two managing editors, who were teachers before they were editors, received a reduction of 25 per cent in teaching load—that is, one course—and so that proportion of their salaries could theoretically be charged against the *Review*. Then there were the salaries of the part-time business manager and the full-time secretary. The paid circulation, except for special issues, such as the Thomas Hardy number, which ran considerably higher, was about 1,500. The deficit, aside from the proportion of the salaries of the two managing editors, averaged about \$7,000 a year.

Who read the *Southern Review*? There were the approximately 1,500 subscribers, but the heavy library subscriptions, with duplicates in some libraries, indicated a fairly large ratio of readers to the copy and indicated also, presumably, a fairly large ratio of young readers. As for the geographical distribution, the concentrations were rather well marked: the middle South, New York and the East, and the West Coast. There was, relatively speaking, a large circulation in England. Calcutta and Tokyo, as the editors were once forced to notice, had, either of them, more subscribers than Atlanta, Georgia. The editors never quite decided what this meant about their self-appointed mission.

In 1942 the *Southern Review* was discontinued. The war had begun, and the gravity of the crisis made some members of the administration of the university feel that there was now no place for such a publication—that funds and energies should be committed elsewhere. Some members of the administration, too, had from the beginning lacked sympathy with the aims of the magazine

and viewed the whole enterprise as unrealistic and remote from the fundamental concerns of a university. Some others, however, emphatically favored the continuance of the magazine. By order of the President, the magazine suspended publication with the spring issue of 1942. With that issue it had completed the seventh volume.

The *Kenyon Review* offered to fulfill the unexpired subscriptions to the *Southern Review*. The offer was gratefully accepted, and as part of the arrangement the editors became advisory editors of the *Kenyon Review*.

July 26, 1953

Cleanth Brooks
Robert Penn Warren

MADNESS IN THE HEART

*. . . the heart of the sons of men is full of evil
and madness is in their heart while they live . . .*

Ecclesiastes IX, 3.

Edward Donahoe

WHEN HE was nine Carl Philbin began to believe that that strange, cross man, his grandfather Wilson, was unusually fond of him. The old man rarely smiled at him, never patted his head like his grandfather Philbin. Carl did not like his amiable and slightly doddering paternal grandfather half so well. Grandfather Wilson was known in Pleasant Prairie as a "character." Because he was rich his vagaries were treated with respect. His crossness was often funny, Carl thought. He said the funniest things crossly, without smiling. Grandfather Philbin was always smiling, but he never said anything funny. People said that he was a saint, whereas old man Wilson was a devil. It is easier for children to admire devils than saints. There is something appealing about a devil. Saints never give children silver dollars to buy candy with. That was what his grandfather Wilson used to do when he would meet Carl in the street. His other grandfather did give Carl a buffalo nickel once. Grandfather Wilson pointed out something amusing about the buffalo. He was a terrible and wicked old man.

Timothy Wilson was born in County Down in the north of Ireland. That was against him, perhaps. The people of the north of Ireland, according to Carl's Philbin relatives, were not Irish at all. It must be wrong not to be Irish, Carl thought, and to regret being Irish was unspeakable. He never told anybody in his life that he had always wanted to be French. He liked the beautiful French names in Geography and pictures he had seen of the Place de la Concorde and Versailles. He wished he could have had a name like

some of the Osage mixed-bloods with French names who went to school with him. Names like Pappan, Plomondon, Fronkier and De Noya. (He supposed years later that De Noya was a corruption of de Noailles, that most glamorous of French names.)

The Philbins were Irish and aggressively proud of it. Many years later when Carl had spent several years in France he ceased liking the French and was not at all sorry he was Irish. His grandmother Wilson had come from Galway. Why she, who had been gently born, had married ferocious Timothy Wilson from Ulster, a few days after they had met in Lawrence, Kansas, before the Civil War, her friends could never understand. The simple explanation that she loved him never occurred to them. He was a wild, rather handsome fellow, who lived recklessly, driving mule teams across the plains to Colorado, fighting Cheyennes, and getting drunk. A fine husband for a young woman who had been educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Galway.

In explaining her husband's quite shocking profanity Mrs. Wilson used to say: "Not even the saints could drive mules for hundreds of miles without learning to curse and swear. Besides, taking the Holy Name in vain is an Irish affliction which God will forgive us for. Timothy became a Catholic to marry me, and he might be one to this day except for the trouble with Father Briscoe. And I don't blame Timothy for that."

The trouble with Father Briscoe occurred in the 70's. Peter Lacey, a poor man in a rural parish near Lawrence to which the Wilsons belonged, hanged himself one night in a fit of drunken depression. Father Briscoe, a stern, uncompromising priest of a type which has died out of Catholicism, refused him Christian burial in the ugly little cemetery on the prairie. That seemed to Timothy Wilson an intolerable humiliation to the dead man's family. He assured the Widow Lacey that her man would be buried in the Catholic cemetery, in spite of Father Briscoe or the Devil himself. By moonlight he and a few other men, whose reluctance to go against the priest he had overcome with whisky, dug a deep grave for Peter Lacey in the Wilson plot and lowered the pine coffin into it.

The remains of Peter Lacey are in consecrated ground where they will remain until the Last Judgment. But whether the curse, which Father Briscoe pronounced the following Sunday at mass

upon Timothy Wilson and his children and his children's children, was really an effective curse is a matter of doubt. As a little boy Carl believed in the curse and was fascinated by it. Because of it he liked to think himself different from other children. When he grew up and ceased to believe in the efficacy of such a curse he almost regretted his disbelief. It would be easier to explain certain tragedies which had happened to the Wilsons if one could attribute them to Father Briscoe's curse.

In the 90's the Wilsons removed from Kansas to Pleasant Prairie in the new territory of Oklahoma. Timothy Wilson was in his early fifties and well-to-do. He had prospered in Kansas. He had perhaps thirty thousand dollars in cash and several valuable farms in the valley of the Kaw. In those lean years following the depression of 1893 he was considered rich. He built a large white house with Corinthian pillars in front of it on Cherokee Avenue, and with his son Paul established the First National Bank of Pleasant Prairie. Paul had attended the University of Kansas. He was the Wilsons' only son. There were four daughters: Cecelia, Ellen, Agnes, and Charlotte. Cecelia, the eldest, had married Franz Dreher, a German farmer in Kansas. They followed the Wilsons to Oklahoma. It was a happy marriage, although it was agreed that Cecelia might have done better. Ellen, who was to be Carl's mother, had taught school for a few years in Kansas, and no one in Pleasant Prairie at that time being literate enough for her to marry, she remained at home and waited for a man of education to appear. In 1899 she found such a man in John Philbin, who had two degrees from the University of Michigan. He had abandoned teaching in a small college in Iowa in order to join his brothers, who were already building small fortunes in the territory. Carl was the only child of the marriage between Ellen Wilson and John Philbin. Agnes Wilson married Max Lansing, a rancher, and lived a few miles from town. Charlotte Wilson, the youngest, was still in grammar school at the turn of the century. She was her father's favorite.

II

Carl remembered his aunt Lottie as a beauty. She probably was hardly beautiful at all, but she had yellow hair, she dressed better than any young woman in town, and she had an expensive way

about her which made her, in Carl's estimation, a very wonderful and almost improbable person. No one else had an aunt like her. Aunts were usually either preoccupied and disapproving, or faintly repulsive women who referred mysteriously, within Carl's hearing, to certain seizures they were victims to. He remembered certain homely phrases they used, and years later he learned what was meant by them. Aunt Lottie was young and friendly. She played ragtime on the fine new Steinway grand piano which Grandfather Wilson had given her. Carl remembered the diamonds flashing on her fingers as she played "Everybody's Doing It." She danced the Grizzly Bear, the Bunny Hug, the Turkey Trot, and the Texas Tommy with her young men. Like her father she gave Carl a silver dollar almost every time they met. She was the only relative except his mother who ever kissed him without making him slightly sick.

Occasionally his aunt would take him for a ride in the shiny new buggy which her father had given her. Cynthia, her stunning mare, had come all the way from Tennessee. It was the pleasantest experience imaginable to sit beside his lovely aunt, her pink linen skirt gracefully arranged over her pretty ankles, the gleam of her white shirtwaist almost dazzling in the afternoon sunlight, a stiff straw sailor perched gaily on her bright hair. She drove like a goddess down Cherokee Avenue, turning into Superb Street so that the hateful Marengo girls could admire and envy her elegant equipage. They usually drove for an hour, sometimes crossing the Arkansas River and venturing a few miles into the beautiful Osage hills, where outlaws used to hide, and where there is always the sense of danger to this day.

Often they would meet Timothy Wilson on their return, waiting for them near the stable, a short, stocky man with an Edward VII beard, still good-looking, who carried an umbrella every day of his life. Aunt Lottie would lift her hand in greeting, halting Cynthia with a flourish. The old man would smile at her with ineffable tenderness. She was the only person he ever smiled at.

"How's my beautiful beauty today?" he would ask. And then he would acknowledge Carl's existence. "Who's that little black-guard with you? Can't you get a beau nearer your own age? You'll be an old maid yet."

He was never without fear that she would marry and leave him at any time. He played with his fear recklessly, teasing her for

being unmarried, ridiculing the young men who came to see her so cruelly that she would fly into a rage and refuse to speak to him for days. She had a temper to match his own. She had always done what she pleased in life. He had made that possible for her. When the inevitable time came for her to fall in love and marry he might have known that she would do so in spite of any objection on his part. They were both ruthlessly selfish people, exactly alike. They loved and hated where they pleased. They endured no restraint. They were passionate, generous, and, when they pleased, tender. They were also shockingly cruel to anyone who challenged their arrogant wills.

She fell in love at last. Carl was twelve years old and he remembered that tumultuous time forever. She was in her middle twenties. She had been in no hurry to marry. She had too much sense to throw herself away on an unambitious clerk in a store or a mild-mannered young physician. Such men were too tame for her tempestuous petticoats. She wanted a man who was all male and who smelt of whisky and cigars before breakfast. She would have made any other kind of man miserable.

Samuel Passington had come to Pleasant Prairie to practice law. He was young, darkly good-looking and, although he was not yet rich, there was every reason to believe that he would be. Paul Wilson regarded him favorably, and Paul was Pleasant Prairie's first snob. He was fond of poker and liquor. His manners were the elaborate manners which are slightly ridiculous to everybody but high-spirited women. He was exactly the man for Lottie Wilson. All Pleasant Prairie thought so except her father. Timothy Wilson would not have given up his daughter to the most remarkable and admirable man in the world.

Lottie told her father that she was in love with Sam Passington, that he had made her an offer of marriage and would apply formally for his consent. Timothy Wilson growled with pain and rage. He was about to utter a series of violent oaths and to behave like all outraged fathers since Juliet's. But he saw Lottie's blue eyes flashing dangerously. The line of her jaw became too strongly defined for him to be unaware of it. The softer outline of her lips vanished. Her mouth was sharply cut and suddenly almost lipless. He attempted diplomacy for the first time in his life.

"Beauty, I want you to promise me not to do anything about

marrying for a year," he said. As the words of refusal began welling forth in her mouth he hurried on: "Now I want you to go to California for a nice long trip. You always wanted to go to Los Angeles. I'll give you plenty of money, and, by God, if you don't stay at the best hotels I'll find out about it and be madder'n hell! You'll forget that blackguard—I mean that fellow Passington—in a week. I'll call up the Santa Fe agent right away and reserve a berth for you. Come down to the bank in the morning and we'll have everything fixed up for your trip."

It was never clear to Carl afterwards why his aunt acquiesced, even if only temporarily. It was unlike her to wait for anything she wanted. She must have known as she waved from the Pullman window to the old man, who was shaking his umbrella at her playfully, that she would marry Sam Passington within a month. Her lover followed her to California in a fortnight. They were married there exactly three weeks after her departure from home.

III

Timothy Wilson's rage was a fearful thing. The first thing he could think of to do was to go into the parlor, where the piano he had given Lottie was, and chop the shiny mahogany instrument to pieces with an axe. He had locked the door so that his wife could not interfere. He also destroyed a rather unsuccessful likeness of Lottie, which had been painted by a nun at a convent which Lottie had attended in Wichita several years earlier. Her father had had the portrait expensively framed and placed above the mantel. When he unlocked the door he found himself confronted by his quiet wife, who, for almost fifty years had never lifted her voice against him. She was very angry. For a moment he was frightened.

"Why, Mollie," he said, "you look so white."

"You terrible man, Timothy Wilson!" she managed to say, her voice high and trembling. "She'll never forgive you, breaking up her beautiful piano like a devil out of hell. You're as wicked as Satan himself, destroying the lovely picture of her, too. I'm glad she married Sam Passington. It serves you right. I'm glad, I'm damned glad!"

This was too much. Timothy Wilson walked in silence to the kitchen, found the can of kerosene which was used to light fires,

and went outside. His wife followed him. She saw him pour kerosene on the roses which she had cultivated with such difficulty and care in a dry, perverse climate. He was destroying all the beauty she had made in Oklahoma.

Mollie Wilson was a woman who had never yet made an important decision, unaided, in her life. At sixty-seven she went into her bedroom and put on her hat. It was a lovely June day. She did not bother about a wrap. She telephoned her son-in-law, John Philbin, to come for her in his new automobile. (She had always been afraid to ride in it until then.) She was waiting for him at the curb when he drove up in the White Steamer ten minutes later. She told him to take her to Ellen. She did not look around at her husband, cursing and weeping on the front porch. She never returned to that house or to him.

IV

Everybody in the Wilson family was waiting for the return of Lottie and Sam, who had prolonged their wedding journey by going to Hawaii. Timothy Wilson was waiting alone in the large house on Cherokee Avenue, impatient as a tiger. Everything was very still and breathless for a while, as immediately before an Indian attack or a storm in August. Carl had once watched a cyclone, whirling out of the southwest like a vast top, and the intolerable fragment of that afternoon before the cyclone arrived to destroy half of Pleasant Prairie was like the quiet time preceding his aunt's return.

One afternoon Carl returned home from school to find his grandfather with his mother. They were sitting in the dark little library which was used for secret and important conferences. It was a small, dark room and because of that it was thought to have privacy as well. But it had four doors, and it was impossible to shut them all at once without rearranging furniture and calling in Caledonia, the cook, to help. Besides, people in the West do not like doors to be shut between rooms. They like one room opening into another, and that one into another. It was not difficult for Carl to hear what his grandfather was saying.

"It's like this, Ellen: that girl deliberately deceived me. She's ungrateful as my bitch whelp we raised in Kansas. I'm through with

her forever. Not only that: I'm expecting every last one of you girls to refuse to have anything to do with her when she comes back with that—that . . ."

"Father!"

"I mean it, so help me. She'll find out what a blackguard she's married to. She'll be sick enough of her marriage. And I'll hound her so she can't have a minute's happiness with him. The rest of my life I'll devote to that. Everything I can do to disgrace her I'll do, by God! I'll tell everybody in town what she is. They'll point at her in the streets as the bad woman who broke up her poor old father's home." Tears of rage and self-pity wet his cheeks and flowed into his beard.

"She isn't responsible for breaking up your home, Father. You can't say that. You broke up your home yourself. Mother couldn't stay with you after what you did. Those roses meant more to her than anything else, more even than we do. How could you do such a thing? And Lottie's piano, and the lovely picture Sister Mary Josephine—"

"To hell with Sister Mary Josephine!"

"Oh Father, if you ever want Mother to come back . . ."

"Want that woman to come back? Do I want poison ivy or the scurvy? Do I want lockjaw and cholera? Oh God! You foolish Ellen, don't you see that I'm about through with all of you? If you ever have anything to do with Lottie and that scoundrel she's living with I'll put a curse on you, too! You can tell that to Cecelia and Agnes, too. And you needn't think I'm only talking. I mean every word I say."

"You're making a mistake, Father." Ellen's voice was firm and no longer soft. She was becoming angry. "You know us better than to believe we'll turn against our own sister for marrying a fine, decent man, a man you ought to be proud of."

"Ellen, if you say another word—" He rose, found his hat and umbrella and left the house.

Carl came into the room. His mother was in tears. She turned away from him angrily. He had blundered stupidly, coming into the room at that time.

V

Cecelia and Agnes were both called upon by their father, who gave them the alternative of breaking with Lottie or himself. They refused to promise not to see their sister and were assured in the most abusive terms that they had forfeited his love and money forever. He had, of course, never heard of King Lear, but he would have found comfort and pleasure in identifying himself with that misused old father. His own rage and anguish were pitiful, even though he deliberately deluded himself into believing himself brutally treated by his daughters.

Timothy Wilson declared war against his daughters with terrible formality. At Christmas he wrote a letter to each of them, announcing his intention to harass them until the end of his life. With subtle cruelty he chose Christmas as a fitting time to attack. It was agreeable to think that he could make them extremely miserable at a season when they might be expected to be comparatively happy. The letters, which arrived by Special Delivery every Christmas morning for several years, were so extravagantly abusive, and even obscene, that they would have been valuable documents for a psychiatrist if they had been preserved. They were all destroyed as soon as they were read. Carl saw only one of them, the first to his mother, and he could only imagine how outrageous they must have become, year after year. The grief they caused his mother and her sisters they never revealed to anyone, not even to one another. They merely said: "Did you receive yours?" And they would look at one another in an exchange of mute despair. They did not even show the letters to their husbands. They would have been ashamed to. Besides, to have done so would have precipitated violence and inevitable scandal.

Paul Wilson had already declared his neutrality. He had been given, on his father's retirement from business at that time, most of his father's interest in the First National Bank, and he had no desire to bring any paternal wrath upon himself by treating his sisters affectionately. He almost never saw them. But even Paul was disturbed when little notes in the old man's handwriting were found tacked on telephone poles all over town. These notes, addressed "to the good people of Pleasant Prairie," accused his

daughters, whose names he carefully printed, of having ruined their old father's life by disrupting his home, forcing him to live by himself in loneliness and discomfort.

Carl found one of these notes and kept it for a long time in the pocket of his Norfolk jacket. It was written in the cramped script of an old person, and the spelling was faulty. Carl was perhaps as ashamed of the spelling as of the contents. He was filled with a shame far more sickening than anger. He was, strangely, not angry at his grandfather. It disturbed him that he was not angry. He was aware that he should want to kill his grandfather for bringing this disgrace upon his mother. He was sorry that he did not even want to kill his grandfather.

In the Pleasant Prairie *Pioneer* a few days before Christmas every year a small item appeared among the advertisements:

Mr. Timothy Wilson intends having his Christmas dinner this year at Joe Jackson's Cafe. adv.

Joe Jackson's was a rather disreputable restaurant run by a Negro.

VI

Lottie was walking on Tonkawa Avenue one afternoon with Mrs. Ware and Mrs. Tally, two ladies who had come to Pleasant Prairie with their husbands at the beginning of the oil discoveries there in 1915. They were Eastern women, smartly dressed and very attractive. Lottie was accompanying them to an auction bridge party in their honor that afternoon. She chatted pleasantly with them, conscious of their warm approval of her, their pleasure to have her sponsor them socially in Pleasant Prairie.

They turned into Palmetto Street where their hostess, Mrs. Kindle, lived in a large square boxlike house of gray stucco, surrounded by stunted catalpa trees. In front of the house on the sidewalk a familiar figure stood, leaning on an umbrella. It was her father waiting for her. A sudden panic seized her and she considered turning back. That would not do any good. There was no escape. Her father had read of the party in the *Pioneer*. He knew that she would be invited. She looked at Mrs. Ware and Mrs. Tally, both

coolly unaware of what was about to happen. She already hated them for the shocked surprise which would come into their faces.

"Here comes," she began to hear, "the woman who ruined her old father's life. Here she comes, wearing the diamond rings I gave her. God curse her and strike her dead!" The rest was profanity and senseless obscenity. She wondered why he let her pass without striking her with his umbrella. His words continued, clear and terrible, until Mrs. Kindle's door closed behind them.

VII

Carl went away to school in 1914. He remained four years at St. Charles', a Jesuit boarding school near Kansas City. During the fall term of his second year there he received word from the prefect of his division that his grandfather was waiting to see him in the visitors' parlor. He was embarrassed and confused. Should he refuse to see his grandfather? He hesitated long enough to draw a sharp rebuke from the prefect. You do not keep anyone waiting at a Jesuit school. You do as you are told, no matter how disagreeable it may be. You are supposed to walk eagerly and bravely to the most terrible ordeal.

Carl wanted to say unkind, bitter things to the old man who was standing in a dark corner of the parlor. He wanted to hate him enough to injure him physically. But he could only shake hands with him and let himself be drawn against the thick, short body of his grandfather and be kissed on the cheek. The old man's beard felt funny, not unpleasant. The kiss was dry from chapped lips.

"I'm taking you to Kansas City," his grandfather announced. "These fellows say I can. We'll have dinner at the Baltimore and see a show. You need anything?"

"No, thank you, Grandfather. I don't need anything."

"Well, we'll see."

Carl wrote his mother about the trip to Kansas City. At the Orpheum they had seen a beautiful girl swinging on a trapeze. She was called Dainty Marie. They had a wonderful dinner at the Baltimore. Grandfather gave him a ten dollar gold piece. He bought him a new hat, a white sweater, a pair of gloves lined with fur, some pretty ties from Gordon Koppel. In the Union Station Grandfather also bought him a box of chocolates, a basket of fruit, and some

magazines like the *Cosmopolitan* and *Red Book* which were not allowed at school.

His mother replied that she hoped he would always be courteous and kind to his grandfather. For the next two years he visited Carl once in the fall and once in the spring. These visits never lasted more than a day. They always went to Kansas City and Carl returned with many presents. They talked hardly at all, and never did the old man mention Carl's mother or his quarrel with her and her sisters. Every Christmas his letters reached them, but they were beginning to regard even these terrible letters almost casually. Carl's mother and his aunt Lottie were occasionally rather merry now after eggnog on Christmas Day.

When Carl left for Harvard in 1918 he never saw his grandfather again. He was in Vienna in 1923 when his mother's cable announced that he was dead.

VIII

Paul Wilson, at his father's insistence, arranged a quiet divorce for the old couple in 1918. His mother protested vainly that she was a Catholic and could not be divorced. She was divorced, nevertheless, in 1918. A property settlement was made between husband and wife. The house on Cherokee Avenue was sold. Timothy Wilson went to live at the Savoy Hotel. His wife continued to live with the Philbins. At eighty Timothy Wilson became restless and began to travel. He went to Oregon where he had a brother. He did not like his brother. A year later he went to Ireland, where he found a few relatives living near Belfast. They were too obviously eager for his money. Then he returned to Pleasant Prairie to make his will and die.

He had made several wills, but he had destroyed them all. He had given a large amount of money away. Anyone could approach him with a story of misfortune and receive generous help from him. He sent a girl with an over-rated contralto voice (and he hated singing) to Italy to study. He had even disliked the girl, but he hoped his daughters would be distressed by his spending money on her.

He became ill. It was impossible for him to be cared for at the Savoy Hotel. Very reluctantly he went to stay at the local hospital

which was conducted by nuns. He became very fond of Sister Teresa, the Superior, as well as a few other nuns. One or two, notably Sister Mary Margaret, he could not bear. He amused the sisters a great deal. They were tolerant of his outbursts of rage, his impatience with certain patients who, he assured them, were not ill at all. He was, as Sister Teresa expressed it, "a handful to take care of," but he prevented life there from becoming dull.

Ellen Philbin went to see him. He refused at first to see her. On a second visit she applied to his favorite, Sister Teresa. It was she who forced him to let his daughter come into his room. Sister Teresa sat with them. It was an awkward meeting. Ten years had elapsed since the afternoon in Ellen's library. At first he would not look at her. They communicated through Sister Teresa.

"Tell my father, Sister, that John and I want him to stay with us when he is well enough," Ellen said.

"You can tell her I'll die first," the old man muttered.

"Ah, Mr. Wilson, you're a foolish, headstrong old rascal!" Sister Teresa said, her cheeks pink with anger. "Mrs. Philbin's too good to be the daughter of a man so mean and wicked as yourself."

He scowled horribly and would have sworn at the nun, but he must have remembered that it was a terrible sin to curse a religious. He had not been to confession for fifty years, but he had not forgotten that. Tears came into Ellen's eyes. She rose to leave. Her father looked at her with a fierce and pitiless hardness. Suddenly that hardness broke, for no reason that Ellen could afterwards explain to herself. His look, which had been hard, was now soft. We love and hate, cease loving and hating exactly like that.

"Ellen, go away now," he said. "I don't want you to stay any longer now. But you can come back, Ellen. I won't be minding your coming back. You go too, Sister Teresa. Hurry up, the both of you, or by God—"

He forgave Ellen. He forgave her wholly. It was difficult for Sister Teresa, aided by Ellen, to persuade him to forgive Cecelia and Agnes. Sister Teresa vowed that she would never visit him again if he would not see them. He gave in ungraciously. Cecelia and Agnes were forgiven, but they were scolded. He would not even consider forgiving Lottie. No threats Sister Teresa could make would move him. Lottie offered to go to see him, and she did stand at the threshold of his room, Sister Teresa's arm around her. But

he would not see her. He turned his face to the wall and would not say anything to her.

He had prepared a final insult for Lottie. In making his last will he left her nothing. He directed that the share of his fortune which would have gone to her, be divided equally among all the churches in Pleasant Prairie.

IX

Mrs. Wilson regarded these doings with contempt. She mocked her daughters for going to see their father. As for herself, she was no milksop, she assured them. When she was through with someone she was through with him. Besides, she added with irony, wasn't she divorced from Timothy Wilson and no wife of his at all?

She spent most of her time with Ellen in the fine, large house on Poplar Street which John Philbin had recently built. Her son-in-law kept her pleasantly stimulated every evening with hot toddies. She was a happy and very pleasant divorcee of seventy-seven. John Philbin she was very proud of. He was a millionaire, as everyone had expected him to be. He had a rose garden planted especially for her to enjoy. She rarely ever thought of Timothy Wilson any more.

One afternoon he came into her life for the last time. A taxicab arrived in front of the Philbin house. Timothy Wilson got out and walked slowly to the door. He was leaning rather heavily on his umbrella. As he approached the steps he glanced admiringly at the façade of the house which he had never seen before. A negro man in a white coat let him in.

"Where's my daughter?" he cried, impatiently. "Why don't she open the door herself? Don't stand there. Get my daughter. Ellen, for the love of God, I don't like doors opened by flunkeys."

Ellen came downstairs hurriedly. She had not bothered to put up her hair when she heard that voice. It was gray hair now and it fell to her shoulders like a little girl's. In the dim light of the hall she looked like a little girl. She was wearing a white negligee. He must have thought her very pretty. He had never* given her a compliment in her life, but she could tell when he approved of her.*

"White dress? Why're these damned floors so slippery? Where's your mother! Don't stand with that look on your face. Do I have to look for her myself?"

"Oh no, Father." Ellen was frantic. "You hadn't better see her just yet. The shock might be bad for her."

He glared at her. "Where's your mother?"

She beckoned to him to follow her upstairs. He was out of breath when they reached the first landing, but he would not take her proffered arm.

"Wait here, Father," she said. "I'll ask her first." But he followed her so closely that there was no chance to prepare her mother for his visit. That was perhaps fortunate, for Mrs. Wilson would surely have refused to see him if she had had a chance to.

The two old people were suddenly face to face. Ellen did not attempt to explain anything to her mother. She left them together without waiting to hear what they would say to each other. She never learned what had been said between them. Her mother denied later that she had even forgiven him. But Ellen had looked through the slightly ajar door before her father came out. He was on his knees, his face in his wife's lap. She was stroking his hair.

Ellen walked to the front door with him. He asked her where Carl was, and when she said he was in Vienna he made no comment. She guessed that he was thinking that he would never see Carl again.

He died a few weeks later in his sleep. He had forgiven everybody but Lottie.

WOMAN IN THE HOUSE

Jesse Stuart

THE MOON was coming up over that fringe of poplar trees last night when I saw Radburn and Hankas coming through the greenbrier thicket by the pigpen. I knowed jist what had happened when I saw them together. They had been over the hill to Mort Anderson's to get some of that old rotgut licker. I knowed I was going to have a time for the night. I saw them come through the patch of ragweeds this side of the pigpen. Radburn was holding to the apple-tree limbs. Hankas was talking with his hands. I could see them just as plain as day. The moon shined on them and if they had been rabbits I could have shot them both, it was so light. Not even a wind was blowing to make a racket. It was the quietest night a body might nigh ever seed. The pigs thought I was coming to slop them when they passed the pigpen. The pigs grunted a little bit. Then they went back to the old sow.

I heerd Hankas say to Radburn, "We gotta take the medicine back to Lake. He is cut purty bad. I could see the blood. It is all over my hand, see! People will think I cut Lake with a knife. God Almighty knows I didn't cut Lake with anything." Then Radburn said to Hankas, "Be quiet so America can't hear you. If she thinks there's trouble she'll be right into it. She's soon hit me as not. She's soon hit you. I know her. I have lived with her long enough to know her. When we first married and got into a racket she knocked me down the first lick she struck me right above the eye. She didn't have on no knucks neither. She done hit with her plain fist. I've lived with her thirty years now and I know she'll fight. Right when we was first married and my step-ma Middie pulled a pistol on Pap, she walked right in and said, 'Give me that gun.' Then she struck her with her plain fist right above the eye—the

same place she allus hits 'em and God only knows how long Middie laid there."

"America allus wuz that way at home. When us kids was playing about the place she whipped all of us but me. I could whip America. I watched and never let her get the first lick. But ever time I whipped her Pap throwed a fit and jumped all over me. I allus told Pap she'd whip the man she married if she ever got the first lick. She allus plugs a body right above the right eye."

"She is a hard woman to live with but she is a good woman. Last winter I'd a been a dead man if hit hadn't been for my wife. You know Lefty Penix, don't you, Hankas? Well, he come over here and we got a holt of some bad licker. We must have went crazy. We got right over there by the corncrib and started to fight. I don't remember hit. But they said Lefty had the corn knife that we keep sticking out there in the crib log to cut the cow corn with—He had that knife and was making for my throat. America saw him. And she come running right through the snow shoe-mouth deep and hit Lefty right above the eye. He had long been sobered up before he come to his senses. Both of that man's eyes settled black around them for a week and a big doorknob riz under Lefty's right eye. But my wife saved my life. If she hadn't run out there I'd a been in hell right tonight."

I could see them comin up closer to the house. There was Radburn, my man. He wore the same old dirty overalls that he'd been wearing all week in the 'backer patch. They was all gluey and would stand alone in the green 'backer glue. His shirt was dirty and his beard was out all over his face. Just me here and I was ashamed of him. Beadie went home with the little Jurdan girl to stay all night; Fonce and Gilbert went to the square dance—Libbie and Win went to see Sister Mossy last week and they ain't got back yet—I was right here—well, Pap was here. But he's sick in there in the bed. He can't do nuthin. Pap has one foot in the grave and the other foot ready to slide in. I knowed Hankas and Radburn was drinking that old rotgut they got over to Mort Anderson's. I knowed trouble was a-brewin. Everytime Radburn gits a drink he thinks he can lick me. He gits to thinkin about me knockin him down and he wants to try hit over and show me he can lick me. Everytime he gits a drink of that old rotgut in him, hit is a fight here. I knowed what was going to happen.

Before they got up to the house I went in the back room and looked under Radburn's pillar. I found his 32 automatic. The moon shined in at the back room window and left a white place on the floor. I stepped out where I could take a good look at the 32. Hit looked right purty fer a pistol. I looked into the chamber and saw that hit was loaded. Then I said to myself, "Ready Hankas. Don't care if you are my brother. Ready Radburn. I don't care if you are my man. Hit won't be a fist above the eye this time. Hit'll be a bullet." They come up and opened the door. There was Hankas, my brother, and he's a big man. Some over two hundred that man is, and mean as a copperhead. I could see in the moonlight he had one of them old sour drunkman's frowns on his face. He looked like the Devil. His arms come down nearly to his knees. They are hairy as a dog. His arms is nearly big as fence posts. He had on his old gluey 'backer clothes too. Hankas has a big blocky body without a pound of fat. He's solid as a rock. But he ain't got much of a head. Hit is a little head for sich a big body. I know how us children used to laugh at him and call him "simlon head." He'd git so mad. He'd want to fight. He could whip everybody. Well, I said if I ever got a house o' my own I'd whip him or I'd kill him before I'd let him run over me. Pap allus upheld for him at home because Pap was afraid of him and Mother was too.

They come in the house. They hushed talkin for a minute when they come in. Radburn struck a match and lit the lamp. I could see he was drunk as a biled owl. Hankas staggered over to the mantel piece and helt onto hit long enough to fill his pipe with my best smokin 'backer. He lit his pipe over the lamp and he looked at Radburn. Then he wiped his hands on his gluey overalls. Pon my word I wouldn't be caught wearing dirty a clothes as them men had on. Hankas said to Radburn, "Call America. Reckon she's here. We got to git the turpentine and git back to Lake. He's cut purty bad. Look at the blood on your hands and on my hands. People will think we cut him. God knows we didn't. I like old Lake. He's a bully good fellar."

"Yes and think about him layin out there bleedin in that ditch." I just stepped from the back room into where they was by the mantel piece. I had the 32 in my bosom. I had my hand on hit. If they had started anything I aim to let 'm have hit right above the eye. I said, "Who got cut?" Radburn said, "W'y America,

Lake Burdock got cut. He's out there bleedin in the ditch." And I said, "Where did he git cut and when?" Hankas said, "Don't know how he got cut. He jist got cut 's all we know about hit. He just fell. He's cut on the hip—place big enough to lay your hand in." And I said, "This don' sound right. Somebody had to cut him. Let me see your knives. Both of you drunk and you wouldn't know hit if you did cut him." Well Hankas looked at Radburn and Radburn looked at Hankas. Then Radburn said, "Hankas we'd better let her look at our knives." They took their knives out and they wasn't a drap of blood on 'em. I felt so good. I felt like gittin down on my knees and praying to God Almighty. I didn't want 'em to have to go to the pen for knifin. I'd rather they'd go to the pen for stealing chickens than for knifin. "Pon my word, Meck," Radburn said, "we didn't cut Lake. We didn't cut him. No." Then I said, "How in the world did he git cut?" Radburn said, "I don't know." Hankas said, "I don't know." There Hankas hung to the mantel piece. The very Devil was in his eyes. I knowed I was going to have trouble that night. The Devil was in his broth a-brewin. I said, "You ain't takin no turpentine out'n here. You go bring that man to this house. Go now before he bleeds to death." And they went out the house. Radburn looked at Hankas and Hankas looked at Radburn. They never said a word to each other ner to me.

I walked the floor. I was so uneasy. I was more uneasy than I was the night Brother Tim and Candy got in that cuttin scrape with the Tinsleys. Tim got his right eye cut out, you know, and Candy got his juggle vein nicked a little and a couple of cuts to the holler. But he lived. One of the Tinsleys bled to death. The other lived but ain't been able to work none since. I was so uneasy that night. But I was just about that uneasy this time. I didn't know what had happened. God knows I didn't. Whippoorwills hollerin up there on the nill and some leaves fell off the trees. I could hear them blowin so lonesome. And I jist paced the floor. The moon shined right up there over the hogpen. I could see the moon then jist like I could see hit last night. I could see the rails on the hogpen jist as plain as I can see my hand before me now. I was so uneasy. The moon kept gittin over further in the sky—out past the hogpen and round to the right near the Hoggen's Graveyard. I could see the tombstones over there on that pint. Hit made me so lonesome—jist like last night. I could see the tombstones and the moon. I

could hear the whippoorwills hollerin and the dead leaves a rattlin in the wind. I guess some tears come down my cheek. I thought I felt tears runnin down my cheeks. I don't know.

Then I looked through the back room winder and I seed two men coming carrying somethin. Hit looked like a log. They was staggerin up the cowpath from that gate right down yander. I heerd Hankas say, "Let's put him down Radburn and open the gate." And I saw them throw the log-looking thing from their shoulders jist like they'd throw down a sack of corn. They opened the gate. Then they shouldered the man. Mercy, how I felt. I thought, "Now what if they bring him here and he dies from that cut. We'll all go to the pen. What if he dies on our hands. People will think we kilt him and the Law will git us all fer killin him. Merciful God, what if he's to die here. A dead man in the house. What would we do? What could we do?" But I saw Radburn and Hankas coming wobblin up the yaller bank down yander on this side of the gate. They wobbled like ducks. The moon shined down on them. It was light as day. And here they come carryin that man. The lamp was lit up in the front room and the moonlight come in at the back room winder.

They come right to the front door. Hankas was behind, carryin Lake's shoulders. Radburn was in front, carryin Lake's legs. Radburn shoved open the door and brought him in feet foremost. And he was bleedin frum the seat of the pants. The blood jist poured on the floor like water from the rain drip. Hankas said, "Meck, git the turpentine quick. He's bleedin purty bad." And I said, "You're so drunk you don't know what you're talkin about. Turpentine ain't goin to stop that blood. Hit takes chimney sut to stop blood. Stick your head up that fireplace there and git some chimney sut from behind the jam rock. Do hit quick. Put Lake on the bed first." They throwed Lake down on the bed hard enough to break all the slats. Lake was drunk as the Devil wanted him to be. Then I said, "Radburn you pull his pants down so I can see where this man is cut. We got to do somethin fer him." Radburn says, "You ain't no doctor, air you?" And I said to Radburn, "I may not be no doctor but tell me nairy nuther woman that's delivered more babies in this country than I have, and I'll eat her blood-raw. Who's cured more sick than I have among cattle and men? Who's cured more colic and fever than I have? Who does the people come to when

they want help—even for drunken fits and blind billiards—I guess you remember that mule's front legs that had all the skin peeled off'n 'em like hit was bark the time he tried to jump the wire fence—who sewed that up? Never was a scar left. Who sewed up a duck's back that the hound pups tore the skin off in a three-cornered fleek? The duck lived, didn't hit? Take that man's pants down. I aim to look at that cut and if I can I aim to sew hit up."

Radburn started undressin Lake. I went into the kitchen and put a fire in the stove and put water in the teakettle. Then I started to huntin fer some white thread and a darning needle. By the time the water het, I had the darning needle and the thread. Radburn had the clothes from off'n the cut. Hit looked like he had been whacked with a corn knife. And I said "Radburn, let me look in Lake's overall pockets." I took his overalls—blood-soaked and dirty with green 'backer glue. I heerd somethin rattle in the hip pocket. And my Lord how hit did stink with that old rotgut whisky. And what did I find in the pocket on the seat of his britches? I found a broken bottle. "Here's what's cut him," I said, "a bottle. He's fell on hit. A rotgut bottle. If hit wasn't fer his wife I wish hit had cut him in two. He's got as good a woman as ever the sun shined on and out carvortin 'round like this. Drinkin 'round and leavin his family at home. I'll sew him up this time. But never again will I do hit." Radburn looked at Hankas. Hankas looked at Radburn. They never said a word. Hankas looked mean as the Devil out'n his black eyes. "Goin' sew him up, air ye," he looked at me and said. And I said, "Yes I'm going to sew him up if this darnin needle don't break."

By this time the water was warm. I brought hit in from the kitchen. Radburn helt the lamp. I swathed out the deep lash. Lake jist laid there and moaned like a fat hog. Then I put the turpentine on. Hit jist keep bleedin. Hankas give me the chimney sut and you'd a laughed to a seen Hankas atter he went up behind the jam rock. He was black as a piece of wet chestnut bur. I daubed the chimney sut in the lash. I knowed hit would leave a black stripe under the skin when hit healed over. But I didn't care. I wanted to save him on account of his wife, Polly, and his five young'uns. I used the chimney sut to stop the blood. I poured in the whole bottle of turpentine to keep hit from gittin sore. Then I pulled up the soft sides of the cut and made Hankas hold them while I used

the darnin needle. Lake flinched a little when the needle went through his skin. I took thirty-seven stitches on that man. And when I got through, the stitches was jist as even as if I'd been tuckin up a skirt that was too long.

Hankas jist set and looked at me. The Devil was in his black eyes. I had the pistol in my bosom. I jist wanted to git away so he couldn't git the first lick. I kept my eye on him all the time. I said, "Pull his pants back on him and throw that glass out of this room, Radburn. Put Lake in the bed. And I don't want any more rotgut whisky brought in this house tonight." Hankas said, "Who's runnin this house? You or Radburn?" And I said, "I'm runnin my own house and them that don't like hit can git out." "Us go, Radburn," said Hankas. They staggered out. Hankas said when he left the house, "Poor home, ain't hit, Radburn, when you ain't got a word to say in your own house." Radburn didn't say a word. He turned and looked back at me. Then they went out into the moonlight, around the corner of the house, under the dark night-shade of the hickory tree—down over the hill toward Reek Finnley's house.

They left me in the house with Lake. He was drunk. I thought he would sober up before they got back and want to know who cut him and what he was doing sewed up. But I had the pistol. I could shoot him if he started anything. I went to the kitchen winder. I looked out. The moon was going down over the cornfield where the boys had cut the early piece of corn. The fodder shocks looked like wigwams between me and the moon. I could hear the lonesome whippoorwill. I could hear the katydids out in the dead grass by the cow lot. I could hear the pigs gruntin. I could hear Lake's breath go up and down and then sizzle like the wind going through the dead sticker-weeds back of the smokehouse on a windy day. And then I heerd the dogs bark over at Reek Finnley's house. I went to the backyard. I looked over at Reek Finnley's place. The house was dark and the moonlight showed on the winder lights. Then I saw the winders lit up with lamplight. I knowed Hankas and Radburn was over there. Then I heerd them talking and cussin around. I heerd Hankas ask Reek if he wanted a drink and Reek said yes. Then I heerd them cussin some more and runnin the dogs over at Reek's house fer barkin at them. I heerd Radburn say, "I'll git my knife out and straddle that dog's back and cut hit's throat

if hit don't shet up that barkin in my ears. I've seed a lot of blood tonight and I wouldn't keer to see a little more."

Well, I didn't want Lake to sober up. I wanted him to stay drunk till morning. So I hunted fer the whisky jug that Radburn and Hankas brought in the house but didn't take out again. I found a gallon jug behind the door with a sea-grass string run through hit's gill. I got the jug and I went to the right, over from where Pap was a-layin and I opened Lake's mouth. I poured rotgut from the jug with the other hand. I guess I poured a pint down him. He guzzled hit down and licked his lips. Then I pulled the pistol from under the bosom of my dress. I looked at the little barrel. I said, "W'y this can't kill a man. I'd ruther trust my fist. The barrel is too little. Look at this little hole. Look at that big man Lake. Look how big Hankas is. Hit would take a bigger pistol than this to kill him. That barrel ain't as big as my middle finger and ain't much longer." So I took the pistol back to the bed and took the shells out'n hit and put hit under Radburn's piller.

I went and looked behind the meal barrel and got the double-barrel shotgun. Hit looked more like a gun to me. Long bright-blue barrels glistened in the lamplight. I brought the shellbox from off'n the wall plate. They wan't but two shells in the box. One was loaded with number three shots and one with number fives. I put the shell loaded with number threes in the left-hand barrel fer Hankas. I put the shell loaded with number fives in the right-hand barrel for Radburn. Then I pulled the trunk out and put hit slonch-ways across the corner of the room so I'd have more room to shoot from. I blowed out the lamp and I got behind the trunk. I panted the double-barrel over the trunk and I cocked both triggers and turned the safety off.

The chickens had begin to crow fer midnight. I staid right behind the trunk with the double-barrel in my hands ready to shoot. I seed the fire in Hankas's eyes. The Devil was in his eyes. I jist waited fer him to come back. I knowed he would want to start something. Well, I heerd him comin. I heerd him come up through the cornfield and cuss about the moon going down. I heerd him say he fell on the sharp edge of a cornstalk where the boys had the potato patch of corn. I heerd him cuss about the night gittin so dark. Then they come to the door. Radburn opened the door. He struck a match

and lit the lamp. Then he said, "Wonder where America is?" And then he hollered and hollered, "America, come here! America, come here! I want some buttermilk. I want fresh water. I want some clean clothes." I never said a word.

They went over to the bed where Lake was. They pulled them up a couple of cheers and set down by the side of the bed. Radburn said, "Wonder if that'll git all right where America sewed up that place?" Hankas said, "Yes. I'd ruther have her as any doctor that's in Berryville. She's my sister and bad to fight but I'd ruther have her by my side when I'm sick as anybody I know." "Cut on glass, wasn't he, Hankas?" "That's what America said." "Do you reckon she'd swear that if the Law gits us all before the court." "Yes, I believe she would." "Well, he's drunk ain't he? Air you drunk? Am I drunk?" "Git that gallon of lickor from behind the door, Hankas, and let's have a snip before we take our shoes off."

Hankas staggered over to the door. He got the jug by the sea-grass string. He took hit over to Radburn. There they set. They wuz jist so drunk they didn't know who hit was in the bed. Radburn put his arms around Hankas. Hankas put his arms around Radburn. Then Hankas said, "You have got a decent woman, Radburn, but she don't treat you right. Now she has left you." "Surely she ain't left me. What will I do about somebody to cook fer me?" "Yes, she's left you." "I'll see." Then Radburn called, "America, America, come here! I want a drink of water. My head is killin me, America, come here." Pon my honor hit was right laughable. Then he got down on his knees and looked under the beds. He looked behind the meal barrel. He looked behind the doors. I leveled the gun right on his head. When he moved, the gun barrels moved. I kept the gun right on him. I kept hit right on his temple. He never did git to the trunk. He went back and set down by Hankas. He said, "You're right Hankas. She's gone. She's left me." Now I kept the gun pointed right at them.

Hankas said, "You got a good woman and you'll miss her some. But hit's the best thing for you. You can live right here by yourself and do your own cookin. Lake can stay with you part of the time. I'll come to see you often. Jist let her go and the Devil take her. You don't need no woman nohow. You can do without a woman more than you can do with a woman. She runs the house. She's hit you with her fist and deadened you two or three times or more than

that. She won't do to fool with. Now you can bring the pigpen out here behind the smokehouse and keep the dogs in the back room there at night. You can put your cows in the mule pasture and the mules in the cow pasture. That will make hit closer to milk out there by the sand rocks. You can make hit all right and you'll be a lot safter right here with your childer or without anybody."

Then they became silent. I kept the shotgun leveled about with their temples. The night out behind the winder was blacker than chimney sut. The whippoorwills kept hollerin. The katydid kept hollerin out behind the smokehouse. I wasn't skeered a bit. I was jist lonesome. God, but I was lonesome. Three drunk men in the house. One of them a brother fer the Devil. I didn't like hit—all the stuff he was tellin Radburn. I didn't want Radburn to run with him and I told Radburn he would git him in trouble. But Hankas jist come up and got him. He can do hit every time. Radburn'll jist do anything Hankas says. He'll follow him any place. And when he gits that old rotgut whisky in him he'll do about anything else.

About four o'clock a chicken crowed and Radburn waked from a doze. He said, "Ain't that boy of Reek's a funny boy? Don't he like licker? W'y when I give him that bottle I had to pull hit away from his lips. But poor boy, Hankas. They have to give him pizen to keep him alive. Hit's the God's truth. They feed that boy pizen. He ain't but ten years old and he weighs two hundred and ten pounds. He walks like a string-haltered hoss. Ever notice him? His face is red as a beet. He's marked with a turkey. Before he come to this world a turkey gobbler flogged his Mama out by the corncrib one morning. That's what the matter with him." "And you say that he has to take pizen medicine so he won't die?" "Yes, hit takes about all the money that old Reek can make to keep that boy alive. He has that boy that eats pizen and eleven more boys stouter than old Reek is. He has seven girls and they ain't much good." "Well, I'll be dogged." "Reek is a clever man as you's ever about the house of." "Reckon that boy got drunk on the licker you give him?" "W'y, yes, he got drunk and even old Reek had to hold to the cornstalks to git up the hill when he left us down there in the holler." "Well, I'll be dogged."

I kept the gun right level with their temples. They dozed off again. Lord, how I did pray for daylight. I never closed my eyes for a wink of sleep. I never put in sich a night in all my life. I

watched the clock. I could see the minutes was creepin up. I could hear the sparrows workin in the box. Hankas riz up and said, "Radburn, we forgot somethin. Give me the whisky quick. We have forgot Pap. We ain't offered Pap no whisky."

Radburn got up and walked over to Pap's bed with Hankas. Hankas helt the jug to Pap's lips and said, "Come on, Pap, and drink with us tonight." Pap waked from a doze and said, "I don't want no drink." "Come on and have one," Hankas said. "Ain't you going to drink with us?" "No, I ain't going to drink none of that stuff. Hit is a sin. The Lord has saved me and I promised the Lord I wouldn't drink no more licker. I aim to be good as my word." Then Hankas turned and said, "I'll be dogged. Lord has saved him and he promised not to drink anymore licker to the Lord. Wonder what the Lord wants fer nuthin. Well, I'll be dogged. My own pap won't drink with me and him so nigh the grave." I kept the double-barrel leveled right on his head. I thought, "If you start anything here I'll git you with a gun this big. Hit will kill you. This ain't no toy 32. This is a gun that will kill." Hankas set down. He dozed off to sleep again.

Of all the snorin I ever heerd in my life hit was from them three drunk men. Of all the strange noises—fiddles, shotguns, mauls, hammers, drums, and axes—I could hear all kinds of noises. I prayed for daylight to come. The sparrows begin to chatter in their boxes. The pigs begin to grunt. The whippoorwill shet up. I could hear the quails hollerin down in the crabgrass. I knowed daylight wasn't fer away. I took the shells out'n the gun. I slipped out the back winder. I come around and opened the kitchen door and come through to the meal barrel. I put the gun behind the meal barrel. Then I come into the front room. I took Radburn by the shoulder and I said, "What's all this goin on here. Run me out'n my house last night, didn't you?" And he said, "I don't remember if I did or didn't." "Well, you did," I says. "I stayed in the woods all night. The moon went down and hit was so dark I couldn't follow a path out and you was drunk and took the place." Hankas waked up and I said, "Brother Hankas, you tried to pour that old rotgut licker down your dyin father's throat. You are a brute." "I didn't do nothin like that, did I?" And the tears jist streamed down his beardy face and dripped off the ends of his beard. He got up and sneaked out home. He couldn't look me in the face.

Lake waked up. He put his hand on hip and hollered, "Oh Lord God, my hip! Whut is the matter with my hip?" I went out of the room. I guess Radburn must to 'a took his pants down and they both looked at his hip. When I come back in, Radburn looked at me and Lake looked at Radburn. Radburn got the express and hauled Lake home. Before Radburn left with Lake he sneaked up to me and he said, "I'm plagued to death over whut happened to Lake."

I never ast whut happened. I knowed whut happened and I wanted to make Radburn tell me, but he did feel too plagued. We both jist hoisted Lake in the spring-wagon on a feathered tick and hauled him home to Polly. I felt a little uneasy about maybe a little piece of glass was left in the lash and hit might not heal. But in a few days Lake was walking round. I heerd my boy say that he was in the crick with Lake and his body was allus dirty as a pig on the seat. Radburn looked at me. I looked at Radburn. We never said a word.

THE WISH BOOK

George Milburn

Six thousand tons of paper . . . whirling through great power presses . . . using seven hundred and fifty pounds of ink an hour. More than a thousand printers . . . working night and day. Machines with great mechanical fingers sorting . . . gathering . . . and binding papers into books . . . Four hundred artists and camera men making thousands of illustrations . . . A great battery of two hundred typewriters clicking out the true story of value . . . And behind these facts other things you cannot see. . . .

THE SUN was blistering the sanded green paint on the M. K. & T. railway station. A gray farm wagon drawn by two mousy mules turned off the dust-cushioned road and came gritting along the graveled platform. It stopped on the shady east side of the depot. The driver eased his blue hulk to the ground and went into the waiting room for whites.

He gaped a moment at the empty slat benches. Flies droned against the paint-sealed windows. There was a muffled chatter of telegraph in the room beyond. The ticket window was shut; so he lumbered on through to the sunny side of the station. He went round and stuck his head in at the negro waiting room, off which the office door opened.

"Hello, Mr. Conklin! Hello!" he bawled.

The station agent, sweltering in a balbriggan undershirt, came to the office door.

"Mr. Conklin, is ary a passel here yit for W. F. Slover?"

"Sure is, Homer; come in on the 4:30 local this evenin'."

"Hot diggety! I shore am proud to hear that. We been lookin' for our ship-mint over a week, and it riles Pap to have me lay out and drive to town so much."

"O. K., Homer. You sign right here on this waybill—if you caint sign, make your mark—and I'll go get your freight."

Homer clamped his tongue in a corner of his mouth and painfully began tracing his name on the wrong line. The station agent rolled back the freight house door and brought out a small red-labeled box.

"Careful how you handle this, Homer," he said. "It's marked explosives. What's that bulshevik pappy of your'n fixin' to do—start him a bumb factory?"

"No, sir, Mr. Conklin; them is shotgun shells. I been waitin' on them so as I could go huntin'."

"Well, if you was so anxious for a few shotgun shells, looks to me like you'd 'a' bought some here in town. The hardware ain't quit handlin' shotgun shells has it?"

"Shucks, Mr. Conklin, my Pappy won't buy nothin' here in town if he can order it. Why I recollect onct the old womern had the neuralgy in her jaw and she had to suffer it six days while Pa was makin' up a order to Sears Sawbuck for some aspireen tablets. Anyhow they charge too much for shells at the hardware. And you got to figger, too, nothing like that caint be sent in the mail; so if anybody orders four boxes, why Sears pays the freight. But that's jist on shotgun shells, because they caint come by mail."

"All right, Homer; there's your shotgun shells. Now you can get on back to your cotton pickin' instid of pesterin' the life out of me about whe'r your freight has come."

"I ain't goin' to pick no more cotton this day, Mr. Conklin. I'm goin' huntin' tonight—and maybe take in the dance."

"Where's the dance at? Odd Fellows Hall?"

"No, I didn't mean no round dance. I meant the big square dance out to Gutterman's place. I allowed you'd heard about Gutterman's dance, Mr. Conklin. You know Bessie, that's Gutterman's old womern, she got ketched a-sellin' bootleg here last spring and Judge Throgmorton give her six months in the county calaboose. So Bessie's gettin' out today, and Herman is th'owin' a big square dance to celebrate."

"Well, Homer, if you aim to get home in time to put on your best bib and tucker, you're going to have to h'ist your tail some, ain't you?"

"Aw, I don't know wh'er I'll even go to the dance or not, Mr. Conklin. I jist said that. I wanted to go, but you know how set in his notions Pap is. I was jist schemin', though, on the way to town—maybe if I went huntin' tonight I could slip off and look in up at Gutterman's and maybe dance me a few sets. But don't you never name it to Pap, or he'd take the hide off'n me!"

"O.K., Homer. Give them gals an exter swing for me."

"I shore will, Mr. Conklin. You come see us some time."

IF YOU WISH

write in your own language. Wysylajcie wasze listy po polsku jertzeli wam sie podoba. Schrijf uwe brieven in het Hollandsch als het u past. Ecrivez en français si vous préférez. Se Lei preferisce scrive in italiano. Napište vaši psani v Českém jazyku jestli si tak přejete. Schreiben Sie uns Ihre Aufträge in Deutsch, wenn Sie wünschen. Skrifva dere brefva på Svenskt om detta är lättare for dere. Escriba en español si lo desea. Skriv paa Norsk eller Dansk hvis det er lettere. . . .

Only one passenger got off the 5:45 that afternoon—a blond lank man who wore a new straw hat and a wrinkled Palm Beach suit. Spike Callahan, the jitney driver, did not even seek a fare. He raced his motor and swung his Dodge sedan away from the station. The lone passenger yelled and struck up a loose-jointed sprint down the platform. Spike put on his brakes.

R. W. E. Ledbetter, editor of the Conchartee County *Democrat*, panted alongside the car. "You drivin' over to town, Spike?"

The hawk-faced jitney driver grunted, "Yah."

"Care if I ride over with you?"

"Naw. Get in," Spike said, but he did not move to flip open a door as he would have for a paying passenger.

Ledbetter trotted round and climbed into the front seat. He

mopped his face as the car sped away. "I could've walked it in ten minutes, but it's so all-fired hot today and I'm anxious to get back to the *Democrat* office and see if Red Currie has got the paper out yet. I was called to Tulsa on business today. I hate to leave Red Currie with so much responsibility, but this was just a case of have-to. Red's a good boy, all right, but he is like ever' sorrel-top ever I saw: little too quick on the trigger."

"He's too damn' smart-alecky to suit me!" Spike snarled. His blotched lean face was set and his bitter lips had gone white. "Soon as you learnt him to run that linotype he got too big for his britches. I went in there today with a piece for the paper and he got awful smart with me. Said I'd have to *pay* to get it in."

The editor was indignant. "He did! Red Currie said that? What was the piece about, Spike?"

The taxi-driver cleared his throat and kept looking straight ahead. "It was just something the wife wrote about our baby."

Ledbetter's face took on a funereal expression and he reached over and laid his hand on the jitney-driver's shoulder.

"Spike," he said, "I sure was sorry to hear about your baby last week. That sure was tough. I didn't get out to the funeral myself—we was a day late with the *Democrat* last week—but Mrs. Ledbetter went, and she said it was beautiful. This makes the second you've lost, don't it? Well, I always say it's just as tough to lose a child right at the start as it is one ten or fifteen years old."

The hard look flickered out of the jitney-driver's dark eyes for a moment. "Yeah," he murmured, "it's tough."

"Have you got it with you, that what the wife wrote? Red Currie ain't editor of the *Democrat* yet by a long shot."

"I didn't aim to mention it again," Spike said bashfully, "but the wife wrote it herself and she thought maybe you'd appreciate it enough to print it in the paper." He fumbled in his shirt pocket and drew out a blue-lined leaf of pencil paper.

The editor unfolded it and began reading in a rapid mutter:

We wish to thank our many friends, neighbors, singers, and Bro. Batenfield for their kind deeds and sympathy shown during our bereavement of our beloved baby daughter. Also for the beautiful floral offerings.

She was a little angel,
Sent to us for only a day,
God wanted another angel,
So He taken our Baby away.
Last Tuesday Arlene was born,
Ere Wednesday she was gone.
She never knew no worldly harms
Ere Jesus taken her to his arms.

(Signed)

Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Callahan
Chester Junior Callahan

The jitney driver said uneasily, "I told the wife she'd ought to sign it 'Spike Callahan and wife,' so folks'd be sure to reco'nize the name, but she held out that just the initials was more proper. What about that?"

"Either way would be nice," R. W. E. Ledbetter said. "Now, Spike, we can run the missus' poem free of charge, but fact of the matter is, Red was right—we do make a small nominal charge for cards of thanks. Only twenty-five cents."

Spike Callahan's face went hard again. He gave a little sneering sniff. "I guess you was going to pay me two-bits when you got in my taxi to be hauled over to town?"

Editor Ledbetter gulped. "Why, no, Spike; I just thought so long as you was coming over to town anyway and didn't have no load you wouldn't mind me riding with you. But—well, sure, if that's the way you look at it, why I'll waive our customary charge. That reminds me, though—before I forget I want to jot down another item."

He reached in his coat for a pencil and scrawled hastily on the scrap of paper: "Ye ed. businesssed in Tulsa Friday."

HERE'S A SIZZLING STYLE

They're a WOW! No fooling! these pants have "IT"! They're really trousers and semivest combined and are they stylish? Say! they were born in Hollywood and in two weeks had spread like a conflagration all the way to

Fifth Avenue! The double-breasted vest effect is what they're all raving about. Vest is a part of the waistband! Fancy buttoned sidepockets, adjustable strap in back, and 22-inch cuff bottoms carry out the stylish scheme. All wool and silk in a rich brown stripe. Sizes 28 to 36 in. waist and 28 to 34 in. inseam. State measurements.

45F8575 . . . \$3.65

Red Currie came down the back alley carrying two pleated gray blocks of Conchartee County *Democrats*. The ink was still moist on the newsprint. Fivefinger Earp's mail truck was parked at the back door of the post office and Fivefinger was going back and forth, unloading the 5:45 mail.

As Red walked round the truck to get in the back door with the papers, he noticed Irene Pirtle standing at the front corner of the post office. His large ears turned crimson and the color seeped over his peaked face. She was the prettiest girl in his high school class.

"Oh, Red," Irene called, "are you going in the back way to mail those papers? Would you do me a favor?"

The blush deepened on Red's face, but he answered smartly, "Sure! Any flavor you want—lemon or vanilla?"

Shrill laughter parted her bright doll mouth and she gave her hempen bob a backward toss to show the warm curve of her throat with its little creases of moist powder.

"Cr-r-a-a-zy!" she shrieked.

Red Currie, saffron-faced, walked over to where she was.

"Say, Red," she said in a low, sober voice, "I'm expecting a package on this mail. I want to be sure and get it before Papa comes for the mail. So would you please ask Mr. Shannon if anything come for me and if it did, get it for me while you're in there?"

"Sure I will, Irene. I'm expecting a package myself and I have to ask about that anyhow. So I can get yours easy if it come."

"I cer'nly would appreciate it, Red."

She idled against the alley side of the building while he went into the post office through the back way. A few minutes later he was back with a large brown envelope and a wide cardboard box.

"Yours sure is light," he said, handing her the envelope. "What's it got in it?"

She giggled. "That's for me to know and you to find out! What you got in yours?"

"Tell me what's in yours and I'll tell you what's in mine."

"I'd *show* you what's in mine if you'd show me what's in yours!"

"Aw, naw. You'll see mine on me soon enough. I guess I'll put mine on tonight and take in a square dance out here in the country. Just to give the hicks a treat."

"I'd wear mine to a square dance," she said, wistfully arching her plucked brows, "if I had anybody to take me."

"Heck, what's the matter with *me*? I'll take you!"

"It's funny you never did ask me before."

"I would of ask you before, but I thought you was stuck on Eagle Catoosa."

"Gosh, no, kid! Papa won't let me go with Eagle no more. Besides Eagle is sparkin' the Widow Holcomb now. That big old fat Indian slob ain't nothing in my young life."

"Well, would you go with me to this square dance if I was to come by for you tonight?"

"Maybe. But you got to let me see what's in your package."

"All right—if you'll show me what's in yours."

She tore open the envelope flap and pulled out a garment of flesh-tinted rayon. She brushed it lightly with her finger tips to restore three small silk rosebuds. He bent forward and peered closely at the shimmering cloth.

"I don't see yet what it is," he complained.

She laughed boldly. "Step-ins, you foolish!"

"Aw, do things like that have *rosebuds* sewed on 'em?"

"You wouldn't kid me, would you? Now let's see yours."

Still a little shocked, he broke the paper tape that sealed his cardboard box. He took off the lid and tore the tissue wrapping away from a fold of brown cassimere with gaudy silk stripes interwoven.

"What's that?" she breathed.

"Sizzle pants," he said proudly. "The latest thing out."

"*Sizzle* pants?" she gasped. "I bet they look funny on you."

"Funny! Wha' ya mean, funny?" he asked huffily. "They're a Hollywood sensation. Trouble with this town is, it don't keep up with the styles. I don't expect these mossbacks around here to appreciate snappy clothes."

"Well, I cer'nly am anxious to see them on you."

"Ain't you got nothing better to do, little missy, than to stand here in the alley talking to a boy?"

They both jumped and looked round at the scrawny man who had slipped up behind them. He had watery pink eyes, and tobacco darkened the sour creases at his mouth.

"Oh, hello, Papa," Irene Pirtle said faintly.

"You march right on up to the filling station, little lady," Ira Pirtle said in a crabbed voice. "I'll attend to you there!"

"Oh, foot!" Irene said, and in a quick whisper to Red added, "Seven-thirty."

IF YOU WISH

to return this merchandise—Write us just a brief note telling us what is wrong and what you want us to do about it. Remember we want the order to be perfectly satisfactory to you. If you want to return the item and have your money refunded, we are ready to do it, but it helps us to know why the order has not pleased you . . .

The sad banshee whistle of the 5:45 came trailing across the flatlands south of town as Spike Callahan's Dodge rustled over the white chat drive beside his rented bungalow. He got out stiffly and walked around by the sunny back porch. A baby boy in clean gingham rompers was knocking toys about in a playpen.

"Daddy's home, Junior," Spike called in an oddly gentle voice. "You got a big old fat kiss for Daddy?"

The little boy turned his head toward the voice and gurgled. As he looked up, the setting sun struck him full in the face. The child met the strong light without blinking his milk-blue eyes. He was blind. He stretched out his arms, groping for his father. One of his tiny hands was a stub with five red buttons in place of fingers.

Spike fondled his son and played with him awhile before he went into the house. His wife, a large blond woman, stood at the gas range, frying steaks. She was dressed in a crisp, green wash-frock, and she looked pale and cool even in the sultry kitchen. A breakfast nook between the kitchen and the parlor was laid for a meal.

"How you feel by now, Kate?" Spike asked as he hung up his hat.

"Pretty good, I guess," she said without looking up. "The heat makes me feel a little faint at times."

"Well, don't go and overdo yourself." He drew water at the sink and began washing his hands. "Say did you get that stuff fixed up to send back to Monkey Wards?"

She was lifting hot biscuits out of the oven. She did not answer at once. He was opening his mouth to speak again when she said quietly, "This is only the second day I've been out of bed."

"Yeah, I know, but if we put off sending that stuff back much longer we're liable to have trouble getting our money back. And we sure could use that \$4.59 we got tied up there. Business is punk."

"I'll get the box ready tonight," she said.

"Did you save them papers that come with the order?"

"Yes, the papers are stuck in the catalogue."

They sat down at the breakfast nook and ate in silence. After the meal Spike lighted a cigarette. He sat moodily picking his teeth. The gray stalks of smoke trailed from his nostrils. She began taking up the soiled dishes.

"Aren't you going to eat your salad?" she asked.

"Naw," he said, chirping through his teeth, "you know I never do touch that rabbit fodder."

She put the dishes in the sink. Then she reached up and took from the shelf above a nicked alarm clock. She began winding it.

"What time does your watch say?" she asked. "I've got to set the alarm so I'll be sure to give Junior his medicine tonight."

He took out his watch and glanced at it. "Five after seven. How is Junior, you think?"

"Those sores don't seem to be healing up at all. Don't you reckon we ought to have Dr. Jenkins look at him again?"

Spike twisted his lips and gave a sardonic snort. "Hell of a lot of good Doc Jenkins done me! You wait and see wh'er this dope we got now don't help.—Say, I give Ledbetter that piece you wrote. He bummed a ride over from the 5:45 this afternoon. Then he had the nerve to want to charge for printing what you wrote in his lousy paper. First that Red Currie in there wanted two-bits to put it in the paper. He got awful sassy—if he'd 'a' said much more I'd 'a' slapped me the snot out of that red-headed brat. I got Ledbetter

told all right. He said it would be in next week's paper. Person'ly, I don't much care."

Her back was turned, but he could tell from the way her large shoulders were quivering that she had started crying again. She stood at the sink weeping softly. There were tears in his eyes, too, as he got up and started toward her. Then he scowled and crossed over to where his hat was hung. He crammed it on and went out the back way, banging the screen door.

She blew her nose and went to the door. "Spike," she quavered, "why don't you stay home tonight and help me put Junior away."

"Ah, naw," he said, getting into the car. "I better get on up town awhile and see if I caint pick up a few nickels. Look for me back when you see me comin'."

SHINE AS THE STARS DO

in Hollywood autographed Fashions. Authentic up-to-the-minute styles worn by famous film stars. These copies of your favorite stars' very own dresses, coats, neckwear, shoes, hosiery, foundations, and bathing suits are offered only by Sears Roebuck. You'll know them on the pages of this catalogue by the actual photographs of beautiful film stars. You'll know them by their special labels bearing the signature of the popular star who wears it. . . .

Pirtle's filling station was the brightest spot on Broadway. It was garish with yellow and red paint by day. It was garlanded with colored electric bulbs by night. The illuminated glass barrels of its three pumps showed for sale red (ethyl), white (untreated), and blue (tractor) gasoline.

Ira Pirtle sat propped in a hickory chair outside the door of his three-cornered office. He held in his lap a new mail-order catalogue. He licked his lips as he leafed slowly through it, drooling over the buxom women pictured on the underwear pages. A car drove into the pool of light and he hurriedly plopped the book down on the concrete floor. He lowered his tilted chair and went over to the gas pumps.

"Give me three gallons of the white, Ira," Spike Callahan said, getting out of the car.

Ira, his moist eyes on the graduated glass, unhooked the hose and began lowering gasoline into Spike's tank.

Spike had his pant-legs pulled up slightly, looking at his shoes under the light. "Ira," he said, "my clutch is leaking oil on me some way. You got an old rag I could wipe off my shoe with?"

Ira hung the gas nozzle back on its hook. "I don't know wh'er I got ary rag here, Spike. Seems like I get so many calls for rags, I just caint keep any on hand."

He went into his office. A moment later he came to the door and said, "This be all right?" He tossed out a begrimed wisp of cloth.

Spike caught it. "Yeah, this is all right. But what the hell! Say, Ira, you're getting pretty ritzy, ain't you, handin' out women's silk undies for customers to wipe their shoes on. How come that, Ira?"

Ira Pirtle did not smile. "I'll tell you how come that," he said grimly. "That daughter of mine's gettin' to where I caint do nothing with her. She come walking in here tonight and she had a parcel in her hand. I ast her what she had in that parcel and she claims she's got dress goods. I ast her to let me see and she says she ain't a-goin' to do it. So I snatched that parcel away from the little missy and looked for myself. And that's what was in it—that there what you got in your hands. Looky what it's got sewed on it! *Rosebuds*. Yes, sir, rosebuds! Dogged if I'm goin' to have ary a child of mine shamin' me by wearin' a garment like that. So I jist naturally ripped it up and throwed it right down on the floor and scrubbed it in the grease. I swan if I can figger out what the young 'uns of today is comin' to. Course that'n of mine never had had no mother to look after her, but I can tell you, she's not a-goin' to disgrace herse'f while I'm here to he'p it."

"That's right, Ira. You got to watch 'em close these days."

"Put that rag in your car, Spike, if you got any use for it. I'd just as soon not have it layin' around the station here."

"O.K., Ira. Now lend me your pliers and I'll see if I caint tighten this clutch up some way to stop that oil from workin' out."

"Here's some pliers. But pull over there by the greasing-rack so as other customers can drive up to the pumps."

Spike ran his car round to the other side of the station. While

he was down on the floorboards, working, an expensive limousine stopped at the curb. A broad swarthy face called low, "Hey, Spike!"

Spike walked over to the other car, peering into the darkness.

"How's-a-boy, Eagle?"

"Sh-h-h!" Eagle Catoosa whispered. "Not so loud. I don't want Old Man Pirtle to know I'm out here. Listen, Spike, this is on the Q.T., see. I got a little job for you."

"How much is they in it?" Spike asked guardedly.

"What you say to five bucks, hunh?"

"Five bucks will be all right. What is it—murder?"

The big Indian chuckled and shoved a five-dollar bill into the jitney-driver's hand. "Naw! Listen, guy, Old Man Pirtle won't let Irene go with me no more because I cut the old man out with Mrs. Holcomb, see. Well, I want to take Irene out tonight anyhow. But she's went out to Gutterman's square dance with the red-headed guy that works in the printing office, see. So all I want you to do is drive out there and get Irene away from the square dance for me. I got reasons for not wanting to show there at Gutterman's tonight. All you have to do is just get Irene off to one side and tell her I'll be waitin' down there at that culvert below Gutterman's place with my parkin' lights on. She'll come right on down there. That kid is nuts over me."

"You say she's with Red Currie? I'm goin' to like this."

"Yeah, that bird thinks he's a hot rock. Well, you'll take care of that all right for me, won't you, Spike?"

"Sure, I'll take care of that for you, Eagle."

"Better take a few drinks on old Herman while you're out there. He's started up again and he's got some pretty fair stuff."

"Naw, I'm off of it, Eagle; doctor's orders."

"A few snorts of Herman's whisky never hurt nobody."

"You might be right at that. Drive on ahead and I'll pass you on the way."

IF IT'S TWINS

Wards will send you an Exact Duplicate Layette Free.

Twins are apt to happen . . . even in the best of well-

regulated families! Not that they aren't welcome, no indeed! Because if there's anything better news than a brand-new baby—it's TWO brand-new babies!

Twilight deepened in the bungalow. After she had put the baby to sleep she wandered through the hot dark rooms. When she came to the bedroom she went over to the clothes closet and took down from the top shelf a cardboard box. She brought it into the living room and snapped on the silk-shaded table lamp.

She sat down and reached under the mission table for the mail-order catalogue that lay on the footboard. The large book opened at a place where a thin fold of wire-stapled invoice papers had been put away.

Tears wetted her cheeks as she began reading again—

PROVIDES HIS NECESSITIES

- 2 Bishop dresses, Cotton batiste, Lace trimmed.
- 3 flannel bands about $\frac{1}{4}$ wool, balance cotton.
- 12 birdseye diapers Hemmed 27 by 27 inch size.
- 1 Dress Hand Smocked Fine Quality Cotton Batiste.
- 2 Gertrudes, Amoskeag 1101 cotton flannel.
Shell stitched edges in pink or blue.
- 2 pairs hose mercerized cotton. Cream white.
- 1 baby book "Health and Care"
- 31D4512 39-piece Layette \$4.59

She turned with sudden resolution to the pink index pages in the back of the book. Then she opened the catalogue on another page. It was headed in large letters:

ORDER WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT . . . BY MAIL!

She read the page again. Again she puzzled over the curious inklings she found there. Unlike those on any other page of the catalogue, the description of each item here was a little nest of hidden meanings.

She mumbled the bewildering words slowly as she read and her eyes were blank with despair. After a long time she lowered her head and laid her face on the open catalogue. She began to pray.

"Oh, dear God," she prayed, "I'm not sure, and I've got to be

sure. You see everything that happens in the world, God, so won't you please help me . . . help me . . ."

IMPORTED CUCKOO CLOCK

Sears Cuckoo Clocks are Imported from the Black Forest of Germany. Stag's head and maple leaf top and front ornaments are hand-carved by families who have been doing carving for generations. Beautiful walnut finish. Ht., 19½ in., Width 13 in., 5 in. dial. Cuckoo appears to call hours and half-hours. One-day weight movement.

5F9314¼ . . . \$14.45

The finest room in Gutterman's three-roomed house was the built-on kitchen. The big brass oil lamp that hung from the ceiling had a mountain scene hand-painted on its white glass shade. The linoleum-covered floor seemed to be tessellated with blocks of red marble and green onyx. Splendid with nickel, huge with hot-water reservoir and overhead warming closets, a six-hole range took up one side of the room. The other side held a varnished oak cabinet with a vast, oval-windowed flour sifter and a polished zinc top.

Over on the wall near the kitchen cabinet a cuckoo clicked out of its ornate little hut and called once for the half-hour.

Spike Callahan put the big jar of whisky back down on the kitchen table and looked at his watch. He went over to the cuckoo clock and moved the hands forward ten minutes.

He was alone in the kitchen. The door leading to the front room was open and through it came sounds of feet thudding on bare boards, shrill giggles and hoarse guffaws, the squeak and twang of fiddle and guitar being tuned, and glimpses of men and women milling past in their Sunday clothes.

Old Herman Gutterman's hearty voice could be heard calling: "Git yore podners fer a quadrille!"

The hubbub got louder, backs thumped against the wall, and then the noise went down. Old Herman was shouting them into their places: "Four couple right this way. Three more couple right over here. Two more couple this way. One more couple . . . All set now!"

Spike Callahan took another long pull at the whisky jar, shuddered, and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. He sat and stared moodily at the open back door.

Homer Slover came sneaking in out of the darkness carrying a double-barrel shotgun. When he saw Spike, a foolish grin spread over his big moonface and he bobbed his head. "Reckon it'd be all right for me to go in there and dance jist wearin' these here over-halls?"

Spike gave him a drunken nod. "Sure, that's O.K., Homer! You're all right. Go right on in there and pitch!"

Homer propped his shotgun carefully beside the back door and tiptoed through to the other room just as the fiddle and guitar swept into the dance tune.

The furious swirls of "Hell Among the Yearlings" came flooding out into the kitchen. The house quivered as the dance began. Someone began clapping loudly in four-four time. The thunder of foot-falls filled the house. Herman Gutterman was bellowing:

*First couple out to the couple on the right,
Lady around the lady with the gent behind,
Lady around the gent and the gent cut a shine.
Couple up four in the center of the floor—
Two little ladies dolce do,
One more heel and one more toe,
One more swing and on you go . . .*

Red Currie, dressed in his sizzle pants, came out into the kitchen and glanced anxiously about.

"Where'd Irene go?" he asked.

Spike turned his bitter, pocked face up at Red. "Where'd you get them pimp's pants, bright boy?" he asked.

"I seen Irene come out here to the kitchen with you awhile ago," Red said. "Where is she now?"

"Oh, you mean you want to know where your girl went! Why, bright boy, I thought you knew all the answers already! So your girl has stood you up, has she, bright boy? Well, what're you whinnyin' around me for? A bright boy like you ought to be able to see that I haven't got your girl."

Red gnawed his lips. He had his fists doubled up. He hesitated a moment. Then he turned and strode out of the house. Spike picked

up the whisky jar and took another drink. A slight spasm twitched his shoulders. He sat there dozing a little.

*All the way to Arkansaw
To eat cornpone and 'possum jaw—
At 'em on the left with the old left hand,
Right and left with the right and left grand.*

Spike jerked his head up and saw Red Currie standing in the back door. Red was holding out a grimy wisp of cloth with three artificial rosebuds on it.

"I found these in the front seat of your car," he said quietly. "I know who they belong to, all right." Then he skinned his lips back over his teeth and screamed, "Now, God damn you, Spike Callahan, you better tell me where my girl is!"

In the room beyond Herman Gutterman was shouting above the wild music and scuffling feet:

*Neck yoke down and double trees draggin',
Once and a half and keep on raggin';
Gals swing hard, but gents swing harder,
Swing that gal by her old rag garter.*

Spike peered at the clue with bleary-eyed wonder. All of a sudden he began laughing. He banged the table with his hand and whooped. Red stood stark in his accusing pose and glared at Spike a moment longer. Then he put his arm down and shifted his eyes nervously.

*Once and a half and the other half too,
Once and a half go all the way through;
Come to your podner and meet her in the shade,
Come to your podner and all promenade.*

Spike held his sides and gasped, "Bright boy, if you keep on, dern if you ain't goin' to be a reg'lar Hawkshaw."

Red Currie reached over beside the door and picked up the shotgun. He pointed it at Spike and said calmly, "I guess this'll make you tell me where you taken Irene!"

Spike's face suddenly grew sober. "You put that gun down, you damn smart aleck, you," he snarled, lurching to his feet.

"Not till you tell me where Irene is!"

"I'll slap some of that smartness out of you, you little red-headed simp!" He came staggering across the room with his open hand outstretched. Red's face puckered up and he began to weep.

"Don't you lay hand on me, Spike!" he sobbed, cringing against the wall. "If you lay hand on me, Spike, I'll shoot you, you see if I don't!" Then with tears streaming over his peeled face, he cried, "You take one more step towards me, Callahan, and I'll blow your guts out!"

He had the shotgun to his shoulder now. Spike halted a few feet from the end of the barrels. "Put that gun down before I grab it and whap it over your head," he said, talking with his teeth clinched.

"You tell me first where Irene is."

"O.K., then. I guess I'll have to take it away from you."

"Stop, Spike, stop!" the boy cried as he pulled the trigger.

After the gun went off there was a deep silence. The music stopped in a long whimper and then no sound at all came from the other room. Spike Callahan stood at the cook stove, against which he had been blown, with a bewildered look on his face. He grunted once and his body folded neatly to the kitchen floor. Red Currie carefully set the gun back where he had got it. He slipped out the back door.

The carved wooden clock over by the kitchen cabinet whirled and the cuckoo popped out at its little door. Its jerky calls fell on the silence ten times.

A woman screamed in the other room. The dancers came swarming out into the blood-spattered kitchen.

LET OUR PERSONAL SERVICE

solve your buying problems. A bit of friendly advice is always helpful on an important purchase. Our Personal Service is free and does not obligate you in any way. It is strictly personal . . .

The bulky catalogue was sodden with her tears and sweat. She kept her face pressed against its musty pages and went on praying.

"Oh, God," she prayed, "it just can't be right. Blind and crippled and still-born, God. Why must I keep on bringing children

like that into the world, God? Oh, God, won't you please let me not ever have another child by him? Please, God, help me . . . help me . . ."

The alarm clock in the kitchen began ringing. She got up quickly and hurried into the kitchen to shut it off. As she turned on the light and walked across to the kitchen shelf she saw that it was just ten o'clock.

This is the story behind this Catalogue . . . the expenditure of time and effort and millions of dollars. These labors have only one aim . . . to illustrate and describe our merchandise with absolute accuracy and truth, and by carrying this conviction to you, to win the privilege of serving you . . . To serve and satisfy you. . . .

GOOD-BY TO CAP'M JOHN

S. S. Field

MY UNCLE, Cap'm John Bell, is a big man with steady eyes. He used to look rather silly in his golfing pants, those transparent linen tights that I dare to remember him in some fifteen years ago—a man who had built up a rugged deep-water towing and dredging business when New Orleans was still a mud flat.

But he has given up the game of golf now. Now he is just rounding that big turn in the weary river, as he says, where the rest is an easy, wide swing down to salt water and the open sea. And so he sits a great deal of the time in the towing office now, looking out over the river, watching the querulous gulls with his distant eyes: the nearly deserted river since the city administration raised the docking fees to the level of the bonded indebtedness. Usually he is fiddling with something, a pencil or his watch chain, looking out at the mile of bending yellow river. He spends a lot of his time that way.

But fifteen or twenty years ago he had a number of the fancy kind of friends, among whom he was compelled to move through a period of uncomfortable collars with the silent and half-smiling suspicion of a roughshod stranger caught in the middle of a minuet.

Because fifteen or twenty years ago he had made enough money, the step into society was down, not up: a man who had generations of tugboats and train ferries and deep-sea barges named for him and for the women of his family, and with generations of river niggers in turn named for the boats. And since it is the women in a man's family who make a business of society, the godmothers of the barges managed it irrespective of his trade and thanks to its profit.

He was saddled first with one of our city's carnival organizations, one of the better ones, and so I remember him also as a prince: a

massive man in button shoes, with the edge of his long underwear showing beneath the elastic of his knee breeches. It was his only carnival appearance; I was there with my mother to watch the night parade from his balcony when he dressed for that ball. "Filthy business," he said, glancing down at me once, tentative, alert; standing in massive and outlandish gravity, looking at himself. I was eleven. He always addressed me as one man to another, as a philosopher, say, to a scientific man, perhaps out of respect for my mother's brave hope or perhaps as his own subtle suggestion that I might continue my growing along masculine lines. "Not many of them seem to on your side of the family, Martha," he used to tell my mother. But standing there that night inspecting his silken bulk, we both were a little anxious. "Yes," he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"It's not the way I look. I look all right. But it's why I look this way." And he stared past himself in the big gold mirror. "I never wanted to get this high," he said.

He took up golf as the natural and most hardy adjunct to the launching of his family in society.

Cap'm John was in society altogether for about four years. He could have stayed there had he wished. He could have steered a carnival float down Canal Street year after year with all the papal altitude of a ferryboat captain and with about as much variety, but he got out. He gave his golf sticks to a negro named Hopper Bell and he went back to sit in the towing office or in the wheel house of a seagoing tug. "Where I belong," he said. He returned to his river and to himself on the day of his third golf tournament; on the day that Frohman died. Frohman was a negro, too.

It is not surprising that at fifty-five my uncle, Cap'm John, excelled at golf. Twenty years ago in New Orleans the game was played by a handful of elderly or ailing gentlemen who would attack the ground with the deliberation and the awkwardness and somewhat the swagger of small boys learning to chop wood—and my uncle was a larger man than most. It is less surprising that he should have excelled at the game than that he should have played it at all. Because he saw beyond that game; as though it were a bend in the river (and so it was), just as he saw beyond most things—himself, for instance. He used to confide in me in those days, and even then

I must have known that he was seeing far beyond my thin legs and my eleven years, placing his confidences upon some later pinnacle to which I might one day climb or not climb. It made me walk straighter, with wider and more alert eyes. Like the thing he said one day about golf: "It is no game for you, you know," he said. "You look mighty neat today."

"No, sir," I said. "Why? Yes, sir, my stockings . . ."

"You should have one stocking coming down," he said. "With both your stockings up you'll be a poet. Because—" he said. "Golf is a circular path. It is for old men who have nowhere to go. Going, you know; that is the thing."

"Yes, sir," I said, secretly loosening one of my pants buckles.

"But few men think of going," he said, fiddling with the golf ball and looking off . . . I remember how he tried to tell me then about golf: about how the things a man does to excess are the measure of his soul, and how going was better than golf; how going holds something finer than the safe little positiveness of the four walls of circumstance, something better than the smallness, the immediacy of the shiny metal blades—the mashies and the niblicks whipped through the grass in pursuit of a little white ball, it also a sphere, resolving into an instant exaltation or despair . . . "It is like the moon." He held up the golf ball. "With its little craters. Never play golf or pool . . . or bridge," he said, "and your chances will be better. Fore."

"Yes, sir," I said. He won his second golf tournament that summer.

I was in the towing office early on the day that Frohman died. I had been promised a ride on the new *Martha R. Bell* and so both of my stockings were down by the time I had run from the street car to the docks and up the stairs. I found Cap'm John standing at the window watching the river. "Good morning, Cap'm," I said. I sat on the high stool, hoping he would notice my stockings.

"Good morning," he said. He said it slowly. "I'm afraid we can't go today." My heart stopped for a sickening moment. "One of my niggers has been hurt," he said. "Another one. I guess we'll have to see what we can do."

"Yes, sir," I said. "What happened to him?"

"He was shot."

I whistled. "Where was he shot? How did he get shot? Who shot him, Cap'm John? What . . ."

"I don't know," Cap'm John said. We were already descending the stairs without my noticing it.

"Will he die?" I said.

"I don't know," Cap'm John said.

"When was he shot? Today, was he? This morning?" I had to run to keep up. We were going fast and both of my stockings were well down. "Who was it, Cap'm John? Which one of them was it?"

"Frohman," Cap'm John said. "My caddy." That was when I remembered that the summer before, it had been Snag.

Snag was a crippled negro who had caddied for my uncle when he won his first golf tournament. Cap'm John had been fond of Snag. He was fond of all negroes, and I remember how pleased both he and Snag would be over any golf shot the two of them contrived to make; it was as though Snag carrying the golf bag and handing the stick was half of the shot without which teeing the ball and driving it could not have had any meaning whatever, and Snag would scramble along behind Cap'm John, fast, with all the keys of a grand piano displayed in his face, saying "Wham, Cap'm Jawn suh! Yes, suh! Us set thatun down like a fo' bits bet. Wham!" all the way to the next shot.

But Snag used to swim in the river. He believed it would help his undeveloped leg. He had a mongrel dog and the two of them would swim on warm mornings up at a great sweeping bend of levee and wilderness beyond the golf course. Sometimes when the current was gone the two of them would swim across. It was on an empty Sunday morning that Snag was killed. He hadn't seen the oil tanker when she came around the bend. They were out in the middle, then, just two black specks on the yellow vastness. Then the long blast came like a mighty trumpet. They said that the nigger must have misjudged their swing. They were already well on the turn when they saw him and they said that they eased the wheel to straighten out and pass the nigger on starboard. They said that he must have just put it to a guess and he guessed wrong because they said that he had two thirds of the river to swim in but that he turned back and so they put the wheel hard to starboard and then he turned back again—the two of them, the nigger and the dog, swimming back and forth each time in a shorter arc until they could see his

face stretched like laughter in the sunshine with all the white teeth, or like a grimace of joyous surprise, recognition, and with men even running forward, waving from the swinging cliff (she was high, empty) and the long trumpet blast right up to the moment he was struck and they wasted the life preserver. He was struck by the great bulging side, nearly amidship, as the wall of steel swung gate-like and fast with the wheel hard over. They saw only the hand and the vanishing gleam of teeth and then nothing. And now it was Frohman.

It was my first visit to a charity hospital. It must have been Cap'm John's first visit, too, for the following year he gave the negroes a hospital of their own. "It's like the inside of a swill pot," Cap'm John said as we waited in the grimy hallway, and he began to curse them for a lot of unclean butchers. "I don't know that your mother would approve of this, and I can't say that I'd blame her. But then you may remember it; come along, then, here we go."

I remember it. Frohman had the face, the nostrils, the eyes, the color of that central figure in most stained glass windows, after the sun has gone down. He was in a ward with unwashed floor and walls among a dozen other negroes in beds, men and women whose dumb eyes followed us in hope. The white rolling irises of Frohman's eyes spoke first when he saw Cap'm John. Then his voice came, very thin now, with a kind of gasping of the light servility and the swagger and the old meaningless effusion. "Yas suh, Cap'm Jawn, suh. Young Cap'm, suh. I jes had to lef you know . . . how I'm is, Cap'm Jawn. Account of how me and you was gwi wham that ball in that turment tomorrow . . . Account of how me and you was gwi . . ."

I remember the long black hand moving on the sheet. Then the doctor came. He seemed too young and thin to be a good doctor. He was explaining the case and drawing with a scalpel on the chart. His voice seemed insolent with gaiety, so near the lean gourd head and eyes of Frohman. I dared to look once more at those eyes that saw only Cap'm John. "Altogether negligible prospects," the doctor was saying and drawing. "A split bullet. You are familiar with the stem and blossom of the tube lily? The split bullet describes that lovely plant form within the intestines; here you have the stem and here you have the blossom forming—" I could feel Cap'm John .

looking inside of the man and waiting too long. When he spoke his voice was quiet and tightening like a warping hawser.

"What are you?" he said. "The gardener? Get this boy moved into a private room. Get out of here and get me a doctor. Get me the head surgeon, not a florist!" And the doctor had somehow vanished.

And so we stood there. It was as though Frohman and Cap'm John and I were each looking at a point somewhere within Frohman, and then it was as though the point, as we watched it, had quietly gone somewhere beyond Frohman and we watched it go, Frohman watching it too, and then our eyes stopped, Frohman's did, and Cap'm John's went on still further beyond that point which Frohman had recognized as the logical place to stop. Because the pain seemed to go out of Frohman's eyes. "Jes account of that turment tomorrow, Cap'm Jawn," he said. The shape of his head made me want to cry. "Account of how me and you was gwi wham that ball tomorrow . . ." Cap'm John's eyes looked now at the new point, the Tomorrow of Frohman's voice, suspended somewhere in the sterile half-light above the bed where the thin profusion, the apologia in little thin strutful vowels, issued forth once more; and then it was as though the other point and this one had become the same and I saw that the corners of Cap'm John's mouth were down and the thin voice was saying, "You got to git mo' right wris' in there, Cap'm, and mind you don't lif' yo' haid—" Then the pale irises rolled back. The pain on his face was like glory. "I ain't be cahyin yo' bag but us'll be pullin' for you, Cap'm Jawn. Me and ole Snag." He looked again, his teeth showing again. "But jes account of that turment, Cap'm Jawn . . . I be thinking if all thing don't go right . . . some kind of lil sen'-over, Cap'm, when you wins that turment . . . Like old Snag used to say, Wham, Cap'm Jawn suh—" Then I was watching the eyes again. "Wham, Cap'm Jawn. Wham, Cap'm. Wham, Ca— . . . wham." Then he was still looking, eagerly now, as though he were watching the flight of a ball, high and far; it too a sphere resolving into an instant exaltation or despair—but he no longer seemed to see. That is the way I remember it.

I cried on the way out. Cap'm John put his arm around me and patted my shoulder. "That," Cap'm John said, "was death. Come along, now."

And so that's how it came to be Hopper Bell's time. It was as if besides Cap'm John's sticks and his linen knickers (through which could be seen with infallible regularity, like an eccentricity in dress, the outline and even the patented seat arrangement of my uncle's underdrawers—until even his underdrawers became an incontrovertible public fact, an incident to recognition, along with his honesty, his button shoes, his size, and his job)—as if besides the sticks and the transparent tights, Cap'm John owned also a private stable of three negroes concomitant to his golf and graded in seniority: Snag, Frohman, Hopper Bell. And now it was Hopper Bell.

And I must say this to Hopper Bell's ghost—wherever it is: that there would have been no cheap tin trophy won by our stable that day had Cap'm John known, as I knew, about the monstrous superstition among those negroes. Because maybe one of them helped to cart the furrowed despair of Frohman to the hospital (they took him there in an ice wagon) and maybe Frohman (he was delirious) had had a vision; I don't know. At any rate, in the lush harangue and babble of the caddy house that day, on the heels of Frohman's death, they knew that there would be three. And now it was Hopper Bell.

He was a tall, thin-headed negro, very black and quiet. He was beautiful, his face and his eyes and the angle of his long head which he carried to one side in a gentle manner and on the top of which he wore (with the pious placidity of a black young saint) a soiled, red bellhop's cap with brass buttons.

But I will always remember Hopper Bell's face on that day that he caddied for my uncle's last golf tournament—the wild, agonized, up-gazing face with the mute velvet eyes. Perhaps it was most beautiful then; it has been stamped upon my mind in pain for such a long time. Because I was there that day of the third caddy and the third tournament. I was there and I knew and I didn't stop them. Following along in the determined little coterie of my uncle and negroes and friends all the way around the circular path, with my stockings down and panic in my mind, I knew and I didn't stop the tournament. I didn't say, "Cap'm John, excuse me, sir, but I must talk with you alone." I didn't say, "Cap'm John, sir, please. Do with me what you will. Kill me, hate me, do anything to me, but please don't finish this tournament." And maybe that is why.

his face has been stamped upon my mind in pain for so long. Hopper Bell's face.

Because I was there that day, because I had to be there that day. I had to be with Cap'm John. Not on account of the tournament. On account of Frohman's death. It had bound me somehow to my uncle and I knew that I had to be with him, close to him that day and the next and the next until time and experience might slowly unite us again as child and man, restore our vast small world of interdependence which the death of a negro had divided as with a wall of silence. Because his eyes were stronger than mine, Cap'm John's: seeing far out beyond that point where Frohman's eyes had stopped, and not coming back. And I had to have those eyes back, close to me again, to center now and then their warmth, their scrutiny, their puzzlement upon mine, and I wanted to hear once more the voice going beyond me—scouting out into the world of his experience and then returning to say, "Well what do you think of this, now," or "What do you think of that." And then we would be once more like two people necessary to each other . . . It has taken me so long to understand my first death, the death of Frohman. And now I wish that we were back the way we were, Cap'm John and I; but we never can be. Too much has died; the wall of silence has gone too high.

So I was there that day. I was alone in the sun outside of the caddy house when I learned; when I heard their voices. I was unraveling the core of a golf ball and thinking about Frohman and wishing that my father too were alive to help me face fear and sadness and a world full of harder boys who were not a prey to their stockings, whose stockings had not become a conscious obsession of fear, a measure of courage or cowardice, a challenge or an admission. But mostly I was just miserable and unraveling rubber when I heard their voices, rich, guttural, quarrelsome, with the sourceless flow and uncontrol of bubbling mush. When I heard the first voice say, "Shure. Cahy that bag and sign your dead warran"! That boy a fool to cahy that bag, man, shure."

And the second voice: "Better be him dan me. Cause de Cap'm jes natchally figure to win dis turment one-up. Jes like it was writ down in de book, cause ain't de Cap'm dooze three-up and two to play in de first turment—"

"And de tanker got ole Snag. Wham!"

"And ain't de Cap'm dooze two-up and one to play in de second turment—"

"And de split bullet found ole Frohman. Wham!"

And then a third and a fourth voice together with the other two in soft, outrageous babbling, in ceaseless turmoil and harangue with the noise that irritable chickens make, the total, the absolute, the utter conviction of sound, "Ole hawd-haided boy. Shure, man, de Cap'm gwi be lookin down Mister Ginny thoat on number eighteen green and then where is you at?"

"An didn' ole Frohman has that dream about passin wid de dices three times, and didn' de dream book say mind out where you walks and git down on de number three?"

"Cap'm gi'ing old Frohman a fawty-dollar sen'-over. Boy, how come you don't gawn home and save de Cap'm money—" And then Cap'm John's voice calling, and the swift silence within the caddy house.

"Hopper? Where's my boy? Come on here, son, and bring my bag."

He came out slowly, with the red bellhop's cap on his saintlike head, down-looking, miserable, as if he were sick, stopping once to kick something with his long thin foot. Then he said quietly, "Yas suh, Cap'm. Here I'm is." Inside the caddy house the dark eyes with the pale china irises watched him go, like the eyes of animals in a cave.

And so there was a gallery of negroes too—a forlorn, downcast, stringy lot, following at a safe distance, not talking.

I don't remember much about that game. We must have made a strange procession forging along with the deliberation of priests and acolytes, with Hopper Bell looking like a walking advertisement for a Georgia Springs hotel, and the trailing negroes and big Cap'm John and Mr. Guernsey and the other negro.

I remember chasing along behind, running often and bumping into them as if I were blind, and being spoken to, and then I remember Hopper Bell's thin, agonized, up-gazing face beneath the red monkey cap watching the flight of the ball with rushing eyes and then I was praying that Cap'm John would lose and it was the next to the last hole and then I thought that I would have to scream

for them to stop and with my mouth already shaped for words and my eyes on the crucifixion of Hopper Bell's face and then Mr. Guernsey had teed his ball and was wagging his club and I couldn't scream.

The rest isn't easy to tell, being a composite within an instant of all the terror, the recrimination, the shame that seems to have been childhood: the instant when Cap'm John struck the ball with all the heave of a spike driver; the click that could have been the snapping of a camera within my mind; the slow instant of exaltation, of despair, when Hopper Bell squeezed his eyes beneath his long pale fingers and the eyes of the other negroes rose and held and sank even as they began to walk away, spent, and when Mr. Guernsey turned to shake hands with Cap'm John (Mr. Guernsey had one ball out of bounds) and Cap'm John turned and Hopper Bell still held his eyes in his Christlike hand.

"What's the matter with my boy?" Cap'm John said. It was late, nearly dark. There were only the five of us at the tee. "What's the matter with my boy? What's the matter with you, son? Won't somebody tell me what's the matter with my darky?"

And then Hopper's voice, sudden, thin, gentle: "Nawsuh, Cap'm suh. Ain't nothin. Wham, Cap'm Jawn suh. Wham, Cap'm!" on an ascending wire of sound.

He thought that I was congratulating him, at first. At first he just thought that I had gone out of control, or maybe he thought that I was trying to fly. It was just that I had to say it then and so maybe I did run headlong into him, leap into him. He caught me rather handily. I remember his embarrassment and the touch of foolish mirth as if some ladies' lingerie had blown into his face and then I was telling him and choking and we were sitting on the green mound and the others had walked away, leaving us alone in the mist that had begun to rise with evening. He listened—quiet, kind, massive.

"Fear, you know," he said. "It is a very real thing . . . Only the truly young in the world have the wisdom to be afraid. Someday you will understand this; that most people on earth are born old and heedless and unafraid." (This was in 1914.) "I am glad you told me," he said finally. "I care less for the game of golf than I do for my caddy's face. Come along, now, and we'll straighten him out."

Frohman's funeral was on the following day and my uncle, Cap'm John Bell, gave him that.

It was fine. Frohman would have been mighty proud to see himself riding in the polished black wagon behind the negro with the cotton gloves and the opera hat. And to have seen the negroes. There must have been a hundred of them who came, appeared, as if out of nowhere, with the definite pomp of people invited to a party, and dressed for the occasion. And then the band! Cap'm John gave him that, too.

So things were a little better that day. Frohman lived out near the New Basin Canal and the railroad tracks, and just the right distance from the sad little picket field of wood and concrete markers that was to be his stopping-off place until some later city ordinance should shunt his dark dust elsewhere in the great anonymity—so we walked; we were a parade. Things were better.

First there was the square black wagon with the screened windows and the carved circus scrollwork, then the six piece band, then Cap'm John and I, and then the negroes. I remember looking back as we turned the corner with the band taking the high notes of "Tiger Rag," their dazzling clarinets and trombones aimed at the sky, shimmering, and I could see all the curled palms swinging in unison with a cakewalk swagger, and the ten or fifteen negroes in bandmasters' uniforms (a kind of outlandish negro improvisation from the outlandish Caucasian habits of Shriners, Elks, Masons, and the Royal Order of St. James, only made of cheap materials; they were an organization) with the black velvet banner and the white cotton gloves. I remember the identical curl of each pair of the white cotton gloves—and the way they lifted their feet: high and slithering as if missing imaginary eggs. It was fine. We must have been grand as we rounded the turn skirting the New Basin Canal on Frohman's march to glory. Even Cap'm John swaggered a little.

"This is better," he said. "I should have my prince suit here. It is remarkable what Providence directs their feet while they aim those horns at heaven. Frohman must be enjoying this," and we sashayed around the turn onto the dry mud street to glory . . .

And so we buried Frohman. Cap'm John was splendid.

And that afternoon too we had our first ride on the new *Martha* R. Bell. She is still in service, small and tough and jovial, with a

decided swagger of her own on the turns. Somehow I know that she will live just about as long as Cap'm John, and not much longer. I see her now and then. And when we marched out of Frohman's funeral that day, and onto her steep, new deck, he seemed to have stepped out of public life and back into the privacy of himself. The only regret I have ever heard him express concerning his brief sojourn among the gentle was over the winning of his third golf tournament.

Hopper Bell, by the way, is dead.

"Experience, you know. That is the thing. Experience is pain and it is out of pain that we grow." I remember he said that, that evening on the way back, hurrying around the great bend in the river, butting our way proudly in the amber afterglow. The gulls were clamoring and moiling over a drifting meal. And then I remember him standing against the evening, looming a little bit in the wheelhouse beside me, silent, watching the river. I remember him that way. When I left him that night I thanked him.

THE WASHERWOMAN'S DAY

Harriette L. Simpson

IT WAS pneumonia all right, but the lye maybe had something to do with it," Granma said.

Mama shifted Joie to her other breast. "Ollie Rankin ought to have had more sense," she said.

"She didn't know the old fool would take off her shoes and scrub the kitchen barefooted."

"Can I go to the funeral?" I said.

"Be quiet," Mama said. "Her shoes were new, and she maybe thought to save them. The poor fool, her legs were swollen purple to her waist, Molly Hardwick said."

"If that Laurie Mae were fit to go into a decent house. They say that baby is exactly like Perce . . ."

Mama looked at me. Granma hushed. "Can I go to the funeral?" I said.

"No," Mama said. "It does make it unhandy. I guess we'll have to get a nigger from Canetown, but I don't like niggers about."

"I always said I'd rather have black trash than white trash any day . . ."

"Did she walk home without her shoes? Susie Chrisman said she did, and there was snow and . . ."

"Hush, Jane," Mama said. "You'll be late to school."

"Spell *vegetation*," Granma said.

"V-e-g-e-t-a-t-i-o-n," I spelled.

"Wear your overshoes," Mama said.

"Don't go about the funeral," Granma said.

"The Ladies Aid are burying her. Susie Chrisman said her father . . ."

"Don't argue," Mama said, and Granma tapped her cane.

I ran all the way to school. I thought all morning, and at noon

I said, "Miss Rankin, my little brother Joie was croupy this morning and Mama forgot."

"What?"

"To write a note of excuse for me to go to the funeral. Susie Chrisman is going."

"Are you sure your mother wanted you to go?"

"Yes, mam. Clarie Bolin has always done our washing. Mama said I should go out of respect for the dead and the Ladies Aid . . . if she was poor white trash. I know my spelling."

"You may go at one-thirty," she said.

Susie and I held hands and ran fast down the sidewalk from the school. We laughed as we ran, for it was good to be out of school and there was a snow promise in the air and Christmas was only two weeks away. At the foot of the hill we stopped. "It's not proper to run all the way to a funeral," Susie said.

"No," I said. "Did they undertake her?"

"No. My father said it was a waste of good money to undertake poor people in cold weather. He sold the Ladies Aid the coffin, though."

"Is it true about the roses?"

Susie skipped twice before she remembered and was proper again. "Yes. The Ladies Aid sent all the way to Lexington. Two dozen white roses, and it the dead of winter. They cost three dollars . . . and her the washerwoman, Papa said."

Inside the church Mrs. Hyden was singing a solo. Her mouth was very wide open, and while we tiptoed to the second row from the back she held the word *dew* until it seemed she would not let it go until we sat down. I was embarrassed and in my haste stumbled over Susie. Susie tittered. When we were seated, Mrs. Hyden sang on about the dew on the roses and the voice she heard.

Susie nudged me. "Laurie Mae don't look so nice. That coat Mrs. Harvey gave her don't fit so good."

I craned my head down the aisle to see. Laurie Mae sat alone in the front row before her mother's coffin. Beside her was a long bundle wrapped in a piece of dirty brown blanket. "Mama said, 'She'll have her nerve to bring that baby.' The Ladies Aid'll be mad," Susie whispered.

"Mama said the baby looked like Mr. Perce Burton," I said.

"On account of Laurie Mae was a hired girl there last year."

Something jerked my pigtail. I looked around. Mrs. John Crabtree set her lips tight together and looked hard at me. She was president of The Ladies Aid, and Mrs. Ollie Rankin sat with her. I nudged Susie, and we were still. Reverend Lipscomb read The Beatitudes and prayed. While he prayed Susie and I raised our heads and looked at all the people. Susie pinched me. Laurie Mae didn't have her head bowed at her own mother's funeral. "Isn't she awful," Susie whispered.

Then the choir sang "Lord, I'm coming home." Then Reverend Lipscomb preached the funeral. I was glad he made it so short. He talked about what the Bible meant when it said things like the poor and the meek shall inherit the earth. He explained that the poor must be hard working and patient and righteous. He said that righteousness had this day been shown by the ladies of the church in their beautiful putting away of the dead. I thought his words were so wonderful that I would remember them.

He said that man was made to err, and that the dead woman had been no different from the world of men, but he hoped that God in His divine mercy and goodness and infinite wisdom would look down on her and forgive her sins and take her to His bosom. He hoped that the one of the living nearest and dearest to the dead would profit by the affliction that God in His almighty wisdom had seen fit to lay upon her, and change the path of her ways and walk henceforth with uprightness and decency. "He means Laurie Mae," Susie whispered.

"She's not even crying," I said.

He finished and the choir sang. Then Miss Virginia played the piano, and we all walked around and looked at Clarie Bolin and the white roses and Laurie Mae. "Didn't she look ugly," Susie whispered when we were back in our seats.

"She looked mad," I said, and didn't want to whisper any more. It was no longer fun. I wondered why the dead woman looked the way she did with her teeth clamped tight together and her thin blue lips drawn back a little ways. She looked, I thought, as if she had just come back from a long fight, and had lost in the fight. I wished in a dim sort of way that she could know The Ladies Aid had spent three dollars for white roses. I thought it would have made her feel better.

Susie's father wheeled the coffin down the aisle. The rollers made

a little squeaking as they rolled over the carpet, and the white roses quivered until one pale petal slipped loose and fell behind the coffin. Laurie Mae sat and looked straight in front of her until the coffin was going through the door into the vestibule. She got up then, and took the ragged bundle from the seat and laid it carefully on her arm, and walked slowly down the aisle. All the ladies looked at her and the bundle, but she did not look at anything.

When the coffin was in the vestibule Mrs. Crabtree and Mrs. Rankin started whispering. We turned around to listen. "Not so much as a thank-you for all we've done," Mrs. Crabtree said.

"As soon as I heard that she was dead I went right up there into that hut," Mrs. Rankin said.

Mrs. Hyden and some other ladies left their places in the choir and joined them. Mrs. Hyden leaned over me to talk to Mrs. Crabtree and I could feel her fat breasts on my shoulder. "What about the roses?" she said. "You're not going to send them to the cemetery?"

"No," Mrs. Crabtree said. "I had thought we might give Laurie Mae some and keep the others for the sewing circle tomorrow afternoon."

"What would Laurie Mae do with roses?" Susie's mother said.

"We could give her just a few . . . I think maybe we ought to."

"I'll go see to it," Mrs. Crabtree said, and got up.

We followed her to the church door, where men were carrying the coffin down the high steps. Susie's father had taken away the roses and stood holding them all bundled in his hands. Mrs. Crabtree took them. She looked at the flowers and arranged them in a neat bouquet. When she had finished arranging them, she turned the bouquet round and round and looked at it. She saw the rose with the petal missing and took it out. Then she took out five others.

Laurie Mae stood on the top step watching the men carry down the coffin. For a moment it looked as if they were going to drop it and Susie and I held our breaths. Mrs. Crabtree tapped Laurie Mae on the shoulder. "Here are some roses," she said, and handed her the six roses. "Reverend Lipscomb will drive you to the cemetery in his buggy."

Laurie Mae took the roses and did not say anything. She waited until the coffin was down and in the hearse, and then went to the buggy. Susie and I watched to see how she would manage. Reverend

Lipscomb hadn't come out of the church, and no one offered to help her into the buggy. She tried first to step in it with the roses and the baby and almost fell over into the muddy road. Then she laid the baby and the roses on the seat and climbed in.

Susie and I followed the hearse and buggy. The grave was on the far side of the cemetery away from the road where there were no fine big tombstones, and the weeds and grass from the summer stood high and brown. We walked up to the edge of the grave and stood while the coffin was lowered, and Reverend Lipscomb said a short prayer.

The others went away then, and left us to watch the men throw the yellow dirt in. Laurie Mae stood behind us a few feet away and watched the men, too. "She means to put the roses on the grave," Susie whispered.

Laurie Mae didn't do that. When the men were finished she turned and started home. "Let's go after her and ask to see the baby," Susie said.

"Mama wouldn't want me to be seen talking with her," I said, and hung back until Susie ran past me calling, "We want to see the baby, Laurie Mae."

The girl stopped and laid the roses on the ground and with her free hand upwrapped the bundle. We stood without saying anything and looked at the baby. I didn't think it was a pretty baby. Its head was too big with the veins showing in its face. "Doesn't it ever cry?" Susie asked.

"No," Laurie Mae said. "He hardly ever cries." Her voice sounded hoarse and rusty as if she had not used it in a long time. She wrapped the baby up again, and picked up the roses.

"Don't you think they're pretty roses," I said.

"They cost three dollars," Susie said.

"Three dollars," Laurie Mae said, and stopped and looked at the flowers.

We thought she would be pleased to know The Ladies Aid had spent so much. Her voice sounded full of something else. We didn't know what it was. "Three dollars is a lot of money," Susie said.

"I know," Laurie Mae said. "It's a lot of money."

We left her then, for she could walk but slowly with the baby and the roses. Susie left me at the cemetery gate for she went one way and I another. I slipped behind the concrete pillars of the gate

and waited. I wanted to see Laurie Mac. I thought that now she was alone she might cry. I wanted to see her cry.

She came out of the gate and looked all around; up and down the road, and at the nearest houses, and up into the snowy sky. When she saw no one she laid the baby on the ground, and took the white roses one by one and threw them in the yellow mud of the road. She pushed them out of sight with her foot and raked the mud over them, and then she picked up the baby.

JERICO, JERICO, JERICO

Andrew Nelson Lytle

SHE OPENED her eyes. She must have been asleep for hours or months. She could not reckon; she could only feel the steady silence of time. She had been Joshua and made it swing suspended in her room. Forever she had floated above the counterpane, between the tester and the counterpane she had floated until her hand, long and bony, its speckled-dried skin drawing away from the bulging blue veins, had reached and drawn her body under the covers. And now she was resting, clear-headed and quiet, her thoughts clicking like a new-greased mower. All creation could not make her lift her thumb or cross it over her finger. She looked at the bed, the bed her mother had died in, the bed her children had been born in, her marriage bed, the bed the General had drenched with his blood. Here it stood where it had stood for seventy years, square and firm on the floor, wide enough for three people to lie comfortable in, if they didn't sleep restless; but not wide enough for her nor long enough when her conscience scorched the cool wrinkles in the sheets. The two foot posts, octagonal-shaped and mounted by carved pieces that looked like absurd flowers, stood up to comfort her when the world began to crumble. Her eyes followed down the posts and along the basket-quilt. She had made it before her marriage to the General, only he wasn't a general then. He was a slight, tall young man with a rolling mustache and perfume in his hair. A many a time she had seen her young love's locks dripping with scented oil, down upon his collar . . . She had cut the squares for the baskets in January, and for stuffing had used the letters of old lovers, fragments of passion cut to warm her of a winter's night. The General would have his fun. *Miss Kate, I didn't sleep well last night. I heard Sam Buchanan make love to you out of that farthest basket. If I hear him again, I mean to toss this piece of quilt in the fire.* Then he would chuckle

in his round, soft voice; reach under the covers and pull her over to his side of the bed. On a cold and frosting night he would sleep with his nose against her neck. His nose was so quick to turn cold, he said, and her neck was so warm. Sometimes her hair, the loose, unruly strands at the nape, would tickle his nostrils and he would wake up with a sneeze. This had been so long ago, and there had been so many years of trouble and worry. Her eyes, as apart from her as the mirror on the bureau, rested upon the half-tester, upon the enormous button that caught the rose-colored canopy and shot its folds out like the rays of the morning sun. She could not see but she could feel the heavy cluster of mahogany grapes that tumbled from the center of the head board—out of its vines curling down the sides it tumbled. How much longer would these never-picked grapes hang above her head? How much longer would she, rather, hang to the vine of this world, she who lay beneath as dry as any raisin. Then she remembered. She looked at the blinds. They were closed.

"You, Ants, where's my stick? I'm a great mind to break it over your trifling back."

"Awake? What a nice long nap you've had," said Doctor Ed.

"The boy? Where's my grandson? Has he come?"

"I'll say he's come. What do you mean taking to your bed like this? Do you realize, beautiful lady, that this is the first time I ever saw you in bed in my whole life? I believe you've taken to bed on purpose. I don't believe you want to see me."

"Go long, boy, with your foolishness."

That's all she could say, and she blushed as she said it—she blushing at the words of a snip of a boy, whom she had diapered a hundred times and had washed as he stood before the fire in the round tin tub, his little back swayed and his little belly sticking out in front, rosy from the scrubbing he had gotten. *Mammy, what for I've got a hole in my stummick; what for, Mammy?* Now he was sitting on the edge of the bed calling her beautiful lady, an old hag like her, beautiful lady. A good-looker the girls would call him, with his bold, careless face and his hands with their fine, long fingers. Soft, how soft they were, running over her rough, skinny bones. He looked a little like his grandpa, but somehow there was something missing . . .

"Well, boy, it took you a time to come home to see me die."

"Nonsense. Cousin Edwin, I wouldn't wait on a woman who had so little faith in my healing powers."

"There an't nothing strange about dying. But I an't in such an all-fired hurry. I've got a heap to tell you about before I go."

The boy leaned over and touched her gently. "Not even death would dispute you here, on Long Gourd, Mammy."

He was trying to put her at her ease in his carefree way. It was so obvious a pretending, but she loved him for it. There was something nice in its awkwardness, the charm of the young's blundering and of their efforts to get along in the world. Their pretty arrogance, their patronizing airs, their colossal unknowing of what was to come. It was a quenching drink to a sin-thirsty old woman. Somehow his vitality had got crossed in her blood and made a dry heart leap, her blood that was almost water. Soon now she would be all water, water and dust, lying in the burying ground between the cedar—and fire. She could smell her soul burning and see it. What a fire it would make below, dripping with sin, like a rag soaked in kerosene. But she had known what she was doing. And here was Long Gourd, all its fields intact, ready to be handed on, in better shape than when she took it over. Yes, she had known what she was doing. How long, she wondered, would his spirit hold up under the trials of planting, of cultivating, and of the gathering time, year in and year out—how would he hold up before so many springs and so many autumns. The thought of him giving orders, riding over the place, or rocking on the piazza, and a great pain would pin her heart to her backbone. She had wanted him by her to train—there was so much for him to know: how the south field was cold and must be planted late, and where the orchards would best hold their fruit, and where the frosts crept soonest—that now could never be. She turned her head—who was that woman, that strange woman standing by the bed as if she owned it, as if . . .

"This is Eva, Mammy."

"Eva?"

"We are going to be married."

"I wanted to come and see—to meet Dick's grandmother . . ."

I wanted to come see her die. That's what she meant. Why didn't she finish and say it out. She had come to lick her chops and see what she would enjoy. That's what she had come for, the lying little slut. The richest acres in Long Gourd valley, so rich hit'd make

yer feet greasy to walk over'm, Saul Oberly at the first tollgate had told the peddler once, and the peddler had told it to her, knowing it would please and make her trade. *Before you die*. Well, why didn't you finish it out? You might as well. You've given yourself away.

Her fierce thoughts dried up the water in her eyes, tired and resting far back in their sockets. They burned like a smothered fire stirred up by the wind as they traveled over the woman who would lie in her bed, eat with her silver, and caress her flesh and blood. The woman's body was soft enough to melt and pour about him. She could see that; and her firm, round breasts, too firm and round for any good to come from them. And her lips, full and red, her eyes bright and cunning. The heavy hair crawled about her head to tangle the poor, foolish boy in its ropes. She might have known he would do something foolish like this. He had a foolish mother. There warn't any way to avoid it. But look at her belly, small and no-count. There wasn't a muscle the size of a worm as she could see. And those hips—

And then she heard her voice: "What did you say her name was, son? Eva? Eva Callahan, I'm glad to meet you, Eva. Where'd your folks come from, Eva? I knew some Callahans who lived in the Goosepad settlement. They couldn't be any of your kin, could they?"

"Oh, no, indeed. My people . . ."

"Right clever people they were. And good farmers, too. Worked hard. Honest—that is, most of 'm. As honest as that run of people go. We always gave them a good name."

"My father and mother live in Birmingham. Have always lived there."

"Birmingham," she heard herself say with contempt. They could have lived there all their lives and still come from somewhere. I've got a mule older'n Birmingham. "What's your pa's name?"

"Her father is Mister E. L. Callahan, Mammy."

"First name not Elijah by any chance? Lige they called him."

"No. Elmore, Mammy."

"Old Mason Callahan had a son they called Lige. Somebody told me he moved to Elyton. So you think you're going to live with the boy here."

"We're to be married . . . that is, if Eva doesn't change her mind."

And she saw his arm slip possessively about the woman's waist. "Well, take care of him, young woman, or I'll come back and han't you. I'll come back and claw your eyes out."

"I'll take very good care of him, Mrs. McCowan."

"I can see that." She could hear the threat in her voice, and Eva heard it.

"Young man," spoke up Doctor Edwin, "you should feel powerful set up, two such women pestering each other about you."

The boy kept an embarrassed silence.

"All of you get out now. I want to talk to him by himself. I've got a lot to say and precious little time to say it in. And he's mighty young and helpless and ignorant."

"Why, Mammy, you forget I'm a man now. Twenty-six. All teeth cut. Long trousers."

"It takes a heap more than pants to make a man. Throw open them blinds, Ants."

"Yes'm."

"You don't have to close the door so all-fired soft. Close it naturally. And you can tip about all you want to—later. I won't be hurried to the burying ground. And keep your head away from that door. What I've got to say to your new master is private."

"Listen at you, Mistiss."

"You listen to me. That's all. No, wait. I had something else on my mind—what is it? Yes. How many hens has Melissy set? You don't know? Find out. A few of the old hens ought to be setting. Tell her to be careful to turn the turkey eggs every day. No, you bring them and set them under my bed. I'll make sure. We got a mighty pore hatch last year. You may go now. I'm plumb worn out, boy, worn out thinking for these people. It's that that worries a body down. But you'll know all about it in good time. Stand out there and let me look at you good. You don't let me see enough of you, and I almost forget how you look. Not really, you understand. Just a little. It's your own fault. I've got so much to trouble me that you, when you're not here, naturally slip back in my mind. But that's all over now. You are here to say, and I'm here to go. There will always be Long Gourd, and there must always be a McCowan on it. I had hoped to have you by me for several years, but you would have your fling in town. I thought it best to clear your blood of it, but as God is hard, I can't see what you find to do in town."

And now you've gone and gotten you a woman. Well, they all have to do it. But do you reckon you've picked the right one—you must forgive the frankness of an old lady who can see the bottom of her grave—I had in mind one of the Carlisle girls. The Carlisle place lies so handy to Long Gourd and would give me a landing on the river. Have you seen Anna Belle since she's grown to be a woman? I'm told there's not a better housekeeper in the valley."

"I'm sure Anna Belle is a fine girl. But, Mammy, I love Eva."

"She'll wrinkle up on you, Son; and the only wrinkles land gets can be smoothed out by the harrow. And she looks sort of puny to me, Son. She's powerful small in the waist and walks about like she had worms."

"Gee, Mammy, you're not jealous are you? That waist is in style."

"You want to look for the right kind of style in a woman. Old Mrs. Penter Matchem had two daughters with just such waists, but 'twarnt natural. She would tie their corset strings to the bedposts and whip'm out with a buggy whip. The poor girls never drew a hearty breath. Just to please that old woman's vanity. She got paid in kind. It did something to Eliza's bowels and she died before she was twenty. The other one never had any children. She used to whip'm out until they cried. I never liked that woman. She thought a whip could do anything."

"Well, anyway, Eva's small waist wasn't made by any corset strings. She doesn't wear any."

"How do you know, sir?"

"Well . . . I . . . What a question for a respectable woman to ask."

"I'm not a respectable woman. No woman can be respectable and run four thousand acres of land. Well, you'll have it your own way. I suppose the safest place for a man to take his folly is to bed."

"Mammy!"

"You must be lenient with your Cousin George. He wanders about night times talking about the War. I put him off in the west wing where he won't keep people awake, but sometimes he gets in the yard and gives orders to his troops. 'I will sweep that hill, General'—and many's the time he's done it when the battle was doubtful—'I'll sweep it with my iron brooms'; then he shouts out his orders, and pretty soon the dogs commence to barking. But he's

been a heap of company for me. You must see that your wife humors him. It won't be for long. He's mighty feeble."

"Eva's not my wife yet, Mammy."

"You won't be free much longer—the way she looks at you, like a hungry hound."

"I was just wondering," he said hurriedly. "I hate to talk about anything like this . . ."

"Everybody has a time to die, and I'll have no maudlin nonsense about mine."

"I was wondering about Cousin George . . . if I could get somebody to keep him. You see, it will be difficult in the winters. Eva will want to spend the winters in town . . ."

He paused, startled, before the great bulk of his grandmother rising from her pillows, and in the silence that frightened the air, his unfinished words hung suspended about them.

After a moment he asked if he should call the doctor.

It was some time before she could find words to speak.

"Get out of the room."

"Forgive me, Mammy. You must be tired."

"I'll send for you," sounded the dead voice in the still room, "when I want to see you again. I'll send for you and—the woman."

She watched the door close quietly on his neat square back. Her head whirled and turned like a flying jennet. She lowered and steadied it on the pillows. Four thousand acres of the richest land in the valley he would sell and squander on that slut, and he didn't even know it and there was no way to warn him. This terrifying thought rushed through her mind, and she felt the bed shake with her pain, while before the footboard the specter of an old sin rose up to mock her. How she had struggled to get this land and keep it together—through the War, the Reconstruction, and the pleasanter after days. For eighty-seven years she had suffered and slept and planned and rested and had pleasure in this valley, seventy of it, almost a turning century, on this place; and now that she must leave it . . .

The things she had done to keep it together. No. The one thing . . . from the dusty stacks the musty odor drifted through the room, met the tobacco smoke over the long table piled high with records, reports. Iva Louise stood at one end, her hat clinging perilously to the heavy auburn hair, the hard blue eyes and the voice:

"You promised Pa to look after me"—she had waited for the voice to break and scream—"and you have stolen my land!"

"Now, Miss Iva Louise," the lawyer dropped his empty eyes along the floor, "you don't mean . . ."

"Yes, I do mean it."

Her own voice had restored calm to the room: "I promised your pa his land would not be squandered."

"My husband won't squander my property. You just want it for yourself."

She cut through the scream with the sharp edge of her scorn: "What about that weakling's farm in Madison? Who pays the taxes now?"

The girl had no answer to that. Desperate, she faced the lawyer: "Is there no way, sir, I can get my land from the clutches of this unnatural woman?"

The man coughed; the red rim of his eyes watered with embarrassment: "I'm afraid," he cleared his throat, "you say you can't raise the money . . . I'm afraid—"

That trapped look as the girl turned away. It had come back to her, now trapped in her bed. As a swoon spreads, she felt the desperate terror of weakness, more desperate where there has been strength. Did the girl see right? Had she stolen the land because she wanted it?

Suddenly, like the popping of a thread in a loom, the struggles of the flesh stopped, and the years backed up and covered her thoughts like the spring freshet she had seen so many times creep over the dark soil. Not in order but, as if they were stragglers trying to catch up, the events of her life passed before her sight that had never been so clear. Sweeping over the mounds of her body rising beneath the quilts came the old familiar odors—the damp, strong, penetrating smell of new-turned ground; the rank, clinging, resistless odor of green-picked feathers stuffed in a pillow by Guinea Nell, thirty odd years ago; tobacco on the mantel, clean and sharp like smelling salts; her father's sweat, sweet like stale oil; the powerful ammonia of manure turned over in a stall; curing hay in the wind; the polecat's stink on the night air, almost pleasant, a sort of commingled scent of all the animals, man and beast; the dry smell of dust under a rug; the over-strong scent of too-sweet fruit trees blooming; the inhospitable wet ashes of a dead fire in a poor white's

cabin; black Rebeccah in the kitchen; a wet hound steaming before a fire. There were other odors she could not identify, overwhelming her, making her weak, taking her body and drawing out of it a choking longing to hover over all that she must leave, the animals, the fences, the crops growing in the fields, the houses, the people in them . . .

It was early summer, and she was standing in the garden after dark—she had heard something after the small chickens. Mericy and Yellow Jane passed beyond the paling fence. Dark shadows—gay, full voices. *Where you gwine, gal? I dunno. Jes a-gwine. Where you? To the frolic, do I live. Well, stay off'n yoe back tonight.* Then out of the rich, gushing laughter: *All right, you stay off'n yourn. I done caught de stumbles.* More laughter.

The face of Uncle Ike, head man in slavery days, rose up. A tall Senegalese, he was standing in the crib of the barn unmoved before the bushwhackers. *Nigger, whar is that gold hid? You better tell us, nigger. Down in the well; in the far-place. By God, you black son of a bitch, we'll roast ye alive if you air too contrary to tell. Now, listen ole nigger, Miss McCowan ain't nothen to you no more. You been set free. We'll give ye some of it, a whole sack. Come on, now—*out of the dribbling, leering mouth—*whar air it?* Ike's tall form loomed towards the shadows. In the lamp flame his forehead shone like the point, the core of night. He stood there with no word for answer. As she saw the few white beads of sweat on his forehead, she spoke.

She heard her voice reach through the dark—*you turn that black man loose.* A pause and then—*I know your kind. In better days you'd slip around and set people's barns afire. You shirked the War to live off the old and weak. You don't spare me because I'm a woman. You'd shoot a woman quicker because she has the name of being frail. Well, I'm not frail, and my Navy Six an't frail. Ike, take their guns.* Ike moved and one of them raised his pistol arm. He dropped it, and the acrid smoke stung her nostrils. *Now, Ike, get the rest of their weapons. Their knives, too. One of us might turn our backs.*

On top of the shot she heard the soft pat of her servants' feet. White eyeballs shining through the cracks in the barn. Then: *Caesar, Al, Zebedee, step in here and lend a hand to Ike.* By sun the people had gathered in the yard. Uneasy, silent, they watched her on the porch. She gave the word, and the whips cracked. The mules strained, trotted off, skittish and afraid, dragging the white naked

bodies bouncing and cursing over the sod: *Turn us loose. We'll not bother ye no more, lady. You ain't no woman, you're a devil.* She turned and went into the house. It is strange how a woman gets hard when trouble comes a-gobbling after her people.

Worn from memory, she closed her eyes to stop the whirl, but closing her eyes did no good. She released the lids and did not resist. Brother Jack stood before her, handsome and shy, but ruined from his cradle by a cleft palate, until he came to live only in the fire of spirits. And she understood, so clear was life, down to the smallest things. She had often heard tell of this clarity that took a body whose time was spending on the earth. Poor Brother Jack, the gentlest of men, but because of his mark, made the butt and wit of the valley. She saw him leave for school, where he was sent to separate him from his drinking companions, to a church school where the boys buried their liquor in the ground and sipped it up through straws. His letters: *Dear Ma, quit offering so much advice and send me more money. You send barely enough to keep me from stealing.* His buggy wheels scraping the gravel, driving up as the first roosters crowed. *Katharine, Malcolm, I thought you might want to have a little conversation.* Conversation two hours before sun! And down she would come and let him in, and the General would get up, stir up the fire, and they would sit down and smoke. Jack would drink and sing, *If the Little Brown Jug was mine, I'd be drunk all the time and I'd never be sob-er a-gin—or, Hog drovers, hog drovers, hog drovers we air, a-courting your darter so sweet and so fair.* They would sit and smoke and drink until she got up to ring the bell.

He stayed as long as the whisky held out, growing more violent towards the end. She watered his bottles; begged whisky to make camphor—*Gre't God, Sis Kate, do you sell camphor? I gave you a pint this morning.* Poor Brother Jack, killed in Breckinridge's charge at Murfreesboro, cut in two by a chain shot from an enemy gun. All night long she had sat up after the message came. His body scattered about a splintered black gum tree. She had seen that night, as if she had been on the field, the parties moving over the dark field hunting the wounded and dead. Clyde Bascom had fallen near Jack with a bad hurt. They were messmates. He had to tell somebody; and somehow she was the one he must talk to. The spectral lanterns, swinging towards the dirge of pain and the monotonous cries of *Water*, caught by the river dew on the before-morning air and held

suspended over the field in its acrid quilt. There death dripped to mildew the noisy throats . . . and all the while relief parties, or maybe it was the burial parties, moving, blots of night, sullenly moving in the viscous blackness.

Her eyes widened, and she looked across the foot posts into the room. There was some mistake, some cruel blunder; for there now, tipping about the carpet, hunting in her wardrobe, under the bed, blowing down the fire to its ashes until they glowed in their dryness, stalked the burial parties. They stepped out of the ashes in twos and threes, hunting, hunting and shaking their heads. Whom were they searching for? Jack had long been buried. They moved more rapidly; looked angry. They crowded the room until she gasped for breath. One, gaunt and haggard, jumped on the foot of her bed; rose to the ceiling; gesticulated; argued in animated silence. He leaned forward; pressed his hand upon her leg. She tried to tell him to take it off. Cold and crushing heavy, it pressed her down to the bowels of the earth. Her lips trembled, but no sound came forth. Now the hand moved up to her stomach; and the haggard eyes looked gravely at her, alert, as if they were waiting for something. Her head turned giddy. She called to Dick, to Ants, to Doctor Ed; but the words struck her teeth and fell back in her throat. She concentrated on lifting the words, and the burial parties sadly shook their heads. Always the cries struck her teeth and fell back down. She strained to hear the silence they made. At last from a great distance she thought she heard . . . *too late . . . too late*. How exquisite the sound, like a bell swinging without ringing. Suddenly it came to her. She was dying.

How slyly death slipped up on a body, like sleep moving over the vague boundary. How many times she had laid awake to trick the unconscious there. At last she would know . . . But she wasn't ready. She must first do something about Long Gourd. That slut must not eat it up. She would give it to the hands first. He must be brought to understand this. But the specters shook their heads. Well let them shake. She'd be damned if she would go until she was ready to go. She'd be damned all right, and she smiled at the meaning the word took on now. She gathered together all the particles of her will; the specters faded; and there about her were the anxious faces of kin and servants. Edwin had his hands under the cover feeling her legs. She made to raise her own hand to the boy. It did not go up.

Her eyes wanted to roll upward and look behind her forehead, but she pinched them down and looked at her grandson.

"You want to say something, Mammy?"—she saw his lips move.

She had a plenty to say, but her tongue had somehow got glued to her lips. Truly it was now too late. Her will left her. Life withdrawing gathered like a frosty dew on her skin. The last breath blew gently past her nose. The dusty nostrils tingled. She felt a great sneeze coming. There was a roaring; the wind blew through her head once, and a great cotton field bent before it, growing and spreading, the bolls swelling as big as cotton sacks and bursting white as thunderheads. From a distance, out of the far end of the field, under a sky so blue that it was painful-bright, voices came singing, *Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho—Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls come a-tumbling down.*

THE GINSING GATHERERS

Howell Vines

THE ELDERLY man and the youngish woman pulled off their shoes and waded the Glaze Shoals in the Little River and came out on the other side not far above the mouth of Glaze Creek. They had left their home across the river on the tip end of the bluff that overlooked the whole Glaze Bend with its rich bottom farm and dense canebrakes. The four o'clocks were open over there in the yard and two powerful and smart dogs were at home to protect the fowls from small varmints and keep the wolves and panthers scared away at night so that the sheep and calves would not be molested in their stables. And in daylight the purple martins or the jaybirds, or both, would keep the hawks scared away from the fowls. The married son would turn out the sheep and calves the next morning and put them up at night.

The "ginsing" season of the year had come and the muscadines were also ripe, and the man and woman were off on a little journey up the length of Glaze Creek and a little beyond to gather ginsing and eat muscadines. The wild fruit and herb hunt would end with a sojourn over the week end at a neighbor's house about four miles away and near the famous Indian spring where Glaze Creek started. But as for the muscadines, they would eat them just to be doing and for enjoyment, as they could hardly work in the fields, or fish, or walk in the fowl range along the river and below the bluff and hillside without being under a river-muscadine arbor. They were really after ginsing and meant to turn it into gold. Glaze was the man's name and he had given his name to the creek, the bend, and the shoals. Daniel was his given name and Sookie was the woman's given name. Daniel found a girl strange to the country on the bank of the river one day and took her home with him; and that night they started living together as man and wife and had been doing it

ever since. She said her name was Sookie and that was all she told him, or so he always said. Daniel was a little stocky, and dark in mien; and Sookie was dark as dusk, and as deep, and built, one could tell, around tendons of great strength and passion.

They were simply out for mutual enjoyment in the woods as had been their custom together for some ten or twelve years. She was a young girl when he got her, for shortly after he had buried his Cherokee wife—the mother of his children—on the bank of the river, Daniel found Sookie and they took up together. Making their something to eat and wear, and spend—on yearly wagon trips to the little capital town of Tuscaloosa about seventy-five miles away—was an easy matter, considering that all this grew in the rich bottom land and in the woods, and in the river, for them while they slept. They followed the creek's course and stopped to fill their sacks whenever they came to the black soil against the coves and foothills where the beeches grew. Wherever Daniel could find beeches standing and dropping mast from which he tolled his mast-fattened hogs there he was almost certain to find ginseng growing. Eating muscadines wherever they found them was only incidental to these pauses for the ginseng roots, as was fondling each other, and it was no great trouble to fill two sacks in the tuber patches splotched up and down the mazy banks of the tiny creek.

And this year they meant sure enough to find a Chinaman somewhere, if possible, and turn these ginseng roots into gold. They might not be able to do it in Tuscaloosa but they ought to in Mobile. If necessary, Daniel would get up a flat-bottomed boat trip to Mobile and try to see a Chinaman. He had in his time helped engineer numerous boat trips to Mobile in the wintertime and early spring and he would get up another one if together they failed to see a Chinaman in Tuscaloosa. People said Chinamen had crossed the great water; and he sincerely hoped that at least one had been dribbled in to the new state of Alabama and found himself in the capital town. But failing in Tuscaloosa, there was the thought of Mobile. He could stop at Demopolis on the way down. And he could find out about Montevallo and Huntsville. One thing certain, he meant to get in touch with the first Chinaman to come to Alabama.

Once he could find some Chinamen, fabulous riches were growing in patches as big as his house all around him. And Sookie was with him, if not ahead of him, in all this. Ginseng was about as plen-

tiful as the mast on which his hogs and the squirrels fattened or the beggar-lice on which his cows fed. It was as bountiful as poke sallet which they themselves fed on every spring, or sassafras from the roots of which they made tea every winter. When Daniel or Sookie had indigestion, they could chew a ginseng root and get well; and they could trade it to the stores in Tuscaloosa for provisions, but that seemed a small matter when a Chinaman would give you a pound of gold for a pound of ginseng. Pound for pound: that's the way it was. And if they once located a Chinaman or two, the white-flowering ginseng in the spring would become their fallen stars and they would visit them just to look and admire against the time they could pull up the roots in late summer and early fall. Why, already they loved to see the flowers in spring and note how the seed pods increased each bed year by year even as they gathered. And if they would let the roots grow they would get bigger and heavier every year until they would be sights to look at. That new bend up the Little River he had bought back at the land sale, why, he would let the three-leaved and five-leaved herb take the top of all the black ground there. Already it was as thick as heartleaves there. Some of the tubers were as big as his arm, and they would get bigger and bigger in the ground as the catfish and turtles did in the river. Going after a sack of gold would be like going to the beech woods. That was the size of it. He had plenty as it was, but naturally he wanted to be rich. If enough Chinamen would come within reach before he died he would be as rich as doe's cream. That was the problem and all there was to it.

Daniel and Sookie stopped to rest and cool off a little, and compute their ginseng at the spring at the head of Glaze Creek. The little creek and the Cherokees had made the spring famous. The man and woman they were going to see had lived there a little while but had moved out to where they then lived to more cleared ground. Sookie was lying back against the green bank by the spring while Daniel fooled around picking up Indian arrowheads at the old shop place left by the blacksmith who had moved out from the rolling ridge to good open land. He saw a big coachwhip wrapped around a half-grown rabbit, and he teased it to get it to run him. He picked up a white flint rock and chunked at it and the coachwhip looked him over. He made a fuss at the snake and the snake licked out its tongue at him and complied with the worst fuss it

could make. Then it uncoiled the rabbit and started for him, and ran him down the bank to the creek, which was called a branch that far up. One had to say, "That's Glaze Creek," or think the thought to recognize it as Glaze Creek there. When Daniel stopped to get something to kill it with, the snake balanced itself on a big embedded rock right over his head, opened its mouth, and made its scariest fuss. That was the climax and Daniel outran the snake to where Sookie sprawled back, looking at the daylight, and did not try to bother the snake any more. He laughed and shivered pleasantly and Sookie joined him.

It took no more than such as this to show Daniel and Sookie a good time and get up a pleasant conversation and a big laugh between them. Anything, just so it thicketed them together more. Daniel had learned to live the thickety life with the Cherokees as tutors and a Cherokee woman as helpmate and partner in daylight and in the dark to such a degree of perfection that he became one of their leaders and their spokesman to the whites. His own farm home and his summer home were filled with Indian utensils, relics, and trinkets such as "tommy hawks," bows and arrows, shawls and blankets. His neighbors could only guess at the Indian secrets he knew, for Daniel played shutmouth along that line. He wouldn't talk, the neighbors said. He had opened up to one person only, his son Daniel—the first white child born in the country—who was then married and raising a family of his own with a white girl, directly across the river from his father. In fact, Little Daniel had sons to whom he was beginning to open up Cherokee secrets. The two Daniel Glazes conversed in the Cherokee tongue as often as in English when off together. There were some important things Daniel had kept from Sookie so that she felt that she hardly knew him. But to compensate for this he never pressed her about her life before he found her, a newcomer in the river country.

Nevertheless, Sookie understood him pretty well and knew the way to his heart. She knew how to enjoy life with him so well that their neighbors said they were as happy as "fee-larks" together. On this day their minds had traveled with them so that they had forgotten the four o'clocks in the yard at home, and the purple martins. When they tried, they could give themselves to the four o'clocks and hold back nothing and virtually be one of the martins; but when they were in the woods, they were in the woods. There their minds

traveled like squirrels traveling in the timber, or the Indian hens through it, or the ground hogs under it. At times their minds sped through the timber like the red deer or to a branch like a mink or a weasel. They had seen so many of all the wild animals while out in the woods together that they could go to sleep of nights counting them up and seeing them again. People said that Daniel had buried himself in the woods. At first a Cherokee woman was buried with him. And some said that later he buried himself deeper with Sookie. Others said that he had buried a white girl with him just as the Cherokee girl had buried him with her. At any rate, Daniel and Sookie played and wallowed and rolled around at the head of the creek, lay down on their all-fours to drink from the spring, and then walked on out the wagon road to Jack Smith's and Alice's house. On the way, there wasn't a step but what they could touch some kind of a tree and keep walking in the road.

II

Alice Smith looked down the spring path and saw them coming. "I see Daniel and Sookie coming," she said. "And they're out gatherin' ginsing of course. They've got their sacks full."

"Yes, it's Daniel and Sookie—I might say Daniel and Ginsing," Jack said. "And I just as soon see the old devil and his wife coming as to see them strollops. They'll stay out their welcome. You can bet your bottom dollar on that."

Some of the children and a visiting boy—one of the Waldrops—heard the conversation.

Jack Smith never had known anybody as well fixed as Daniel Glaze who wanted to strollop around so. Neither had Alice. Or anybody else for that matter. Not on the Warrior River or back on the Savannah River in Georgia—and across in South Carolina—where they had come from to the spank-fired new state. Daniel had learned it from the Cherokees and that Cherokee wife of his. They were all gadabouts. They didn't know anything else. That Sookie had made him worse in his old days. An old man had no business taking up with a girl even if he did discover her. That woman couldn't be still at the house like a decent woman was supposed to. They had followed the wild animals so that Daniel was just like one of them, let alone Sookie. That was the reason the Indians never had any-

thing. They went forth and called on the spirits of spots, or places, and streams as Daniel said. That was their religion. It was a traveling sort of religion. Animals traveled, and so did Daniel and his mate. No other woman would be content to leave the martins and jaybirds in charge of the chickens and guineas and things. But since they bet on the martins that way, they did see to it that the martins stayed with them even after they had raised. Daniel raised a patch of what he called his martin-gourds every year and kept putting up more poles. Somehow or other he charmed them. They had up an understanding it seemed. Daniel said birds could tell when you loved them to the bones. He said he loved the very hearts of the purple martins and made them know it. He made them appreciate him as their friend, he said, but he gave all the credit to the Cherokees. Whenever you saw a martin at your house you could safely say, "There's one of Daniel's martins."

Daniel and Sookie and deep dusk came to the Smith homestead at one and the same time. "Light, hitch, and come in, as Uncle Cape used to say," Jack said. Alice bade them come in and make themselves at home. It developed that they were all getting along the best kind.

Daniel gave Jack a going-over for not coming across the river and helping him drink rum. He had kept a jug named for Jack Smith from his friends Tommy Lisper and Tommy Prescott and was still looking to some good fellowship over the jug with Jack. He always tried to make it a point to get over a jug of likker with each good friend at least once a year. And Sookie gave them a going-over for not coming over the river and helping them eat watermelons. They had had the *most* of them. The only way to enjoy watermelons to the fullest was to have your friends visit you and help you eat them. Why, watermelons grew like "punkins" for them on the river bank. It was fun to see how much they would grow overnight. Jack and Alice had just not had time to get over; but they would get over there one of these days. "We'll come when you're not expecting us, Daniel," Jack said.

The menfolk went to the lot to see about feeding the things while the womenfolk remained in the kitchen preparing supper. It was a sumptuous meal fit to weight down the revolving table and fill the large family and visitors besides. One thing Daniel had schooled Sookie in to perfection. He had taught her to cook as his

Cherokee wife cooked before her. Thus Sookie naturally told Alice again, as she had time before, how she cooked according to the Cherokees. So the two women actually enjoyed themselves telling each other how they cooked.

Sookie's cooking was more like a man's cooking out in the woods or on the river. Say camped out on a wild hog hunt or a midnight supper on a coon hunt at night, or a fish gigging where the fish are cooked on the spot. When she prepared "rosenears" for the table, she roasted them in the shucks in coals. She not only fried fish in the skillet but baked it in a shuck in the coals as well. And she would bake fish on a hot rock. The best way to cook cornbread or flourbread was to bury it in the coals and have roasted hoecakes. Ash cake, she called it. Alice roasted her sweet potatoes in the coals and ashes and that was all. And Sookie had to tell her all about the stews and fixments and messes she made of herbs from the river-bank, fish and turtles from the river, and game from the woods. Daniel's house was noted for its dried fish and dried venison and beef, and Sookie talked a blue streak about that. Alice in turn cooked everything in the old-time white woman's way by boiling, baking, or frying—and sometimes broiling over the log fireheap in the fireplace. The supper consisted of victuals from the garden and field, the bread barrel, and the smoke house prepared in this way, plus milk from the spring served in big goblets and butter served in a huge bowl with much milk still in it. It was a supper the Glazes enjoyed the best kind, and certainly appreciated as a change, but it would have been hard to have eaten a meal at their house without eating fresh eating from the mast or canebrakes, or fish from the river, or dried meat of some kind from the woods. They could not have lived and done well on so many vegetables and field crops all the time as they knew the Smiths mostly did. There was plenty of cured hog meat from the smoke house or the Glazes would have been at a loss even while enjoying the sumptuous change of fare.

III

On the front porch Daniel was explaining how thunder killed turkeys in the egg. He was going into details and speaking from personal experiences. He said that was the reason turkeys do not raise more in the woods than they do. If every close clap of thunder

that came did not kill them in the egg they would raise so fast that they would be as plentiful in the woods as partridges or jorees. And that might not be a good thing, for that many turkeys would tear up the ground and take the country.

Daniel and the grown boys were talking of going down in Jack's branch field and catching a coon or two, when, all of a sudden, the wolves came in from the head of Black Creek or the mouth of Wolf Creek and tried to get to the sheep in the stable. This scared the children in bed and got up a general excitement, and a "sicking" on of the dogs. Jack's cur and hound were joined by Bill Glaze's cur and hound who ran over to investigate, and the race was on towards the fork of the creeks. Bill Glaze was Daniel's cousin who had come into the Indian realm on the river with Daniel. It was a moonlight night and there were paths to follow, and Daniel fled after the dogs without looking to see who was going with him. Such as this excited him. He had to get out and follow the dogs regardless. Without saying a word, Sookie and the grown boys followed.

Jack and Alice sat on the porch, thinking about the Glazes and talking. They talked about Daniel and his two brothers and cousin who were the first whites to enter the country. They had respect for Bill Glaze, their near neighbor, who had waited for more whites to come in and married a good white girl. Indeed they had been glad for one of their girls to marry one of Bill's boys. He had helped replenish the new country in the good old Bible way just as they had seen it done back in Georgia and across the river in Carolina. Daniel and Bill were raising up two different races of dogs entirely. Each race had its own kind of sharpness. But the Smiths were all for Bill and his set and against the wild life of Daniel's set. They believed in education and training. People were like animals. They had to be trained. They had to be schooled and not by peckerwoods and soft-shelled "turkles" and wild hogs. This raising children up in the woods to be regular old ground hogs would not do. They spoke with great respect when mentioning Daniel's brother Tom, who traded around with him until he finally hung in at Tuscaloosa and became the first banker there. They knew very little about their brother Bill, who stayed on a while longer with Daniel and finally went to Tom in Tuscaloosa. They had heard that he followed the Indians into Mississippi.

Daniel was too wild a flower for them. They would not go that

deep into the woods. They looked back to the garden flowers the Glaze boys had been back in Charleston. Daniel had thrown himself away and could have done better. He had buried himself in the woods first with a Cherokee woman and then with a strolloping, no 'count, low-down, ignorant white girl. A cultivated, well-educated South Carolinian of Charleston had turned ground hog. He was at first as well prepared for a political career as anybody in Charleston. Daniel had it in him to be somebody. And as long as he was legislator representing the Two-Warriors territory at Cahaba and Tuscaloosa it seemed that he had found himself. But the woods finally closed in on him forever, once the Indian questions had been settled. Now he would be a fit representative for the beavers and otters but not for human beings who believed in progress. He was a good example of what the woods would do to a man if he let himself go. He would go wild and mate with anything that came along just so it was a woman. He had forgotten his A B C's and she never had learned them. It was a sight to see the fine Charleston furniture and stuff Daniel had in his farm home and his summer home and think what he had come to. It was something to study about.

The dogs ran the wolves along Black Creek and on across Dividing Ridge, down Cymbing Branch and into the Short Creek country where Tommy Lisper and his boys lived. All this time Daniel and Sookie kicked around and found themselves in several beds of ginseng and heartleaves against the spots where the beeches grew; and the boys went to the branch field, where the coons had been eating the corn, to see how things looked. Tomorrow ginseng could be gathered there and maybe some roots shaped like a man could be found. If that could be done, it would help out when a Chinaman was found. People said it would make a Chinaman fall all over himself and mumble. Some of these stems had five leaves, too. That would bear investigation the next day. How much a wealthy Chinaman would give to be able to walk in the beech shades and kick around in ginseng and heartleaves! From the way the heartleaves smelled, Chinamen ought to be able to turn them into something valuable. People said these Chinamen believed ginseng would *cure* anything. And a root shaped like a man would *do* anything. If the Chinamen knew about this country they would come over here and settle if they could get permission. ♥

While milling around in this way the Warrior River pair hap-

pened upon a doe and some slinks licking salt at a salt lick in a boggy place near a spring. Their hearts beat like bluebirds flitting about in a limb, and in the moonlight night the deer looked white as sheep. Daniel was glad that he had no weapon, not even one of his bows and arrows. It was a picture of heaven to the man and woman with the timber-traveling minds. It took Daniel back to many inspirations such as these encountered with his Cherokee mate out in the woods when their hearts burrowed the earth and drew them down wallowing. Back then they always went out—day or night—and sought such benediction scenes when they wanted to be most intimate with one another. They believed that children should come from such times and that such a child bore a charmed life. Under such circumstances as these he had the red deer follow him and his mate nearly home. Partly because of such incidents the idea got abroad that the red deer were not afraid of the Cherokees and would even follow them. Daniel told Sookie that the deer mostly followed the Cherokees west—that they had very few deer left compared to what they had when he came to the country. They were afraid of the whites for more reasons than their guns. The red deer were important in the timber-traveling religion Daniel was converted to when he mated with the Cherokee girl.

Following the benevolence of this scene, Daniel and Sookie entered into an intimacy such as Daniel used to enter with his Cherokee wife. Sookie had learned to expect her best times with Daniel upon such occasions and in such spots. He did not believe in the house for such intimacies and neither did Sookie. That's what Daniel liked about Sookie. She had a mind, and a heart, and a body for the woods; and that is what others did not know about her. Daniel had more passion than Jack Smith could appreciate and so did Sookie. No other girl in the country since the native girls had gone west could have matched Daniel even with old age coming upon him. He had wanted to live through such scenes as this with every beautiful grown girl he ever had seen and end up by being buried on the spot. But he considered the Cherokee girls best for such a life except an occasional white girl like Sookie. The Indian girls could best enter into the earthy religion of it all. Oftentimes he wished he could single out these grown girls with the earthy religion in their hearts and experience life with them one by one on the spots all over the river world, and die with them as people said

some fish die after such action and be buried in a green bank in the same hole with them. His idea of heaven was to be a young god of the woods, forever living intensely enough to kill and being ever intense enough for an awakened life. That, however, he knew would make a man the equal of the Supreme Being and could not be. In his ordinary moments when he considered this mating business he thought that any man ought to be mighty glad to marry any woman. That was the plan of life. Almost any girl would answer and answer well so that she would be a blessing if taught right. Few if any normal women were at fault if they were not benedictions to their husbands. He believed that almost any normal woman could follow the greatest of men. There were great men and ordinary men and sorry men. But most all women could be great if given the right man.

IV

In the morning it was Saturday. Jack Smith usually spent sweet Saturdays in his blacksmith shop. No matter what the work through the week, he always reserved Saturday for his mendings and creations at the forge and anvil. He was known as a good horse master. All of his boys were talented smiths. People said that it ran in the Smith blood. They could make anything and do anything in a blacksmith shop. They could please themselves and thought they could please God best when in a shop using their heads to invent and their hands to fashion. A man was given a mind to guide the hand in its creations in the blacksmith shop, to farm, to read the Bible, the almanac, and pieces of paper. All of the Smiths believed in knowledge as such and in doing things. But that morning the man from across the river and his mate were there in the way. The Smiths, however, would not have been in the way of the Glazes if if they had been across the river that morning. Perhaps the Glazes would have taken them into the woods to show them or tell them something, or down to the river. The Glazes believed in knowledge that carried feeling with it. Going about the comfortable Glaze home place would in itself have been like being in the woods, for Daniel and Sookie made their home place, which showed beautifully that human beings used there, seem like a part of the green thicket. But the Smith home place was another kind of using place which tallied not at all with the using places of the red deer. Never-

theless, the Glazes enjoyed the change of scene and the contact with other minds. Sookie enjoyed it primarily because Daniel did. They were both fond of the growing Smith girls. Some of the children resented this and some did not. The boys simply enjoyed hearing Daniel talk and did not mind Sookie, for she was Daniel's dough-baker and bedfellow.

Daniel hung around the shop and kept Jack in a bad humor. Sookie hung around the house and garden and worried Alice a little and interested her some, especially when telling about the Chinaman they hoped to find in town. Jack was a firm and fractious man. He had what was called the Smith fits. That is, he had mad spells, and Daniel brought on these mad spells that morning. Two or three times between watermelon cuttings in the shop and at the house Jack Smith threw his hammer against the shop walls and mildly blasphemed it, the unsatisfactory work he was doing, and all that. Daniel tried to tell him things about the work that made him wall his eyes and want to spit fire.

However, the men got to talking about the Bible and this was a godsend part of the time. Smith was a great Bible reader, although he was not such a terribly religious man. Daniel had read the Bible a good bit in his time but had quit as he had quit other books long before. Like a stroke from this talk on the Scriptures Smith said, "I'm just as glad that there's a devil and a hell as I am that there's a God and heaven." He was known for this idea. The young people thought it was an infidelity or something bordering that but often decided he was right about it when they grew older and knew more about the earth life. Daniel knew enough about the earth life to appreciate the idea and said so. But his idea of hell was not Smith's idea, and he said it was not. The one thought hell was a place of fire and brimstone and the other thought it was a state of being lost and desolate in some place. Hell to Daniel was a place where there were no friendly spirits of spots and none of the earthiness that they congregate to. Smith adduced all this to Daniel's having buried himself in the woods, kept the thought to himself, and got mad at his hammer again.

But the men did agree on the Bible in many places. They agreed on it when it spoke on the man and woman business. Smith never thought of the women and girls as nymphs, and consequently never talked about them from that angle. But he had thought about them

in many of the good old Bible ways and could lead any conversation along these lines. Daniel thought there was little difference in the end between the Bible on women and his own thickety ideas on women and he was right there with Smith when he said, "You see, the man that made this world and his legal advisers made a blunder when they made a man without a woman. They seen it wouldn't work. They was experimenting. They seen their mistake when they seen all the man's blunders and mismanagements." The two dark-featured and well-built pioneers got together on this and enjoyed themselves mutually. And Smith went on, "You take me and let me get old and some sixteen or eighteen year old come along and I'll want her. If Alice was to be dead, I'd want to marry her. I'd take up with her somehow or other or bust a gut. And if I was to marry the girl, she could ride me a bug hunting to the bluff and make me jump off and think it was fun. A young woman can do to an old man any way under the sun. You take that beautiful young girl who warmed King David's bed. If he'd been left alone with her he'd a give her his kingdom and him a man after God's own heart. The Lord knows we're weak that way and He don't fall out with us for that weakness." They agreed again and Daniel said that Sookie was like the women back in King Solomon's time. She was easy to get along with. Women honored the menfolk back then. Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines and cooks and house-girls. The women were good women, easy to please and not hard to satisfy. Sookie was like that. Well, Alice was, too.

And about dinnertime Jack got to asking Daniel some questions about Charleston, the Cherokees, his Cherokee wife, his terms as a legislator in Tuscaloosa, and Sookie, which Daniel evaded or turned off. Jack did not mind telling all about how he came to the Warrior Rivers with Alice from the Savannah River in Georgia in one of Tommy Thompson's mule wagons in 1820 and first stopped at the great basin in the fork and was outbid on the basin at the land sales. But Daniel knew all about that anyhow. One man had no secrets and the other one had a whole flock of them.

V

Daniel and Sookie went off to the woods for ginsing that afternoon. Daniel, especially, was not out only for ginsing. He was out

to strike Cherokee trails where in his day he had had some rolling times. In fact, anywhere he tolled his hogs from the beech mast or acorns, or followed his cattle through the beggar-lice or the red deer over their drives to the canebrakes on the riverbank, or the black bear, he could strike these paths. When he went out and killed a wild turkey eating turkey peas, or cut down a tree for a coon, or caught a red horse in the river, he was apt to strike up with the spirits of spots, the ghosts of particular places, still in their old lodgings even with the Cherokees gone. Most of these presences, he thought, had followed the Cherokees west but some remained. Those who remained kept his religion alive. But there was a wistfulness and a sadness about these that remained not encountered among them in the good old rolling days. Nevertheless, the best that remained hovered over and along these old Indian paths.

That night at Jack Smith's house they had a fine mess of red horses for supper. Daniel and Sookie made the Smiths give way while they prepared the fish and the meal; and the Smiths could not help but enjoy it. They forgot that Daniel and his woman were strollops. While finishing supper Daniel got a fishbone lodged in his throat and couldn't get it out. He tried and tried and followed suggestions, but couldn't make it. The Smiths liked fish as well as the Glazes. Jack had as big a craving for fish in his mouth as Daniel had, but just couldn't take time off to get out and catch them. When he went fishing he had to take off from his work. But Daniel seemed to have no such sacrifices to make in order to get the fish. If Jack had lived right on the river as Daniel did it would have been the same way with him, he declared.

After supper Daniel and the boys were fixing to go to the branch field and catch a coon or two. The coons were eating up the corn. Daniel promised that he would come back over and show them how to catch the last one of them; but in the meantime they would catch one or two and scare the others for awhile. He was also coming back and help them build a wolf pen. Nobody else in the country, he said, knew as well how to catch coons or build wolf pens unless it was Tommy Lisper.

But as they were making preparations to start to the branch field they heard a panther squall. "Listen at that painter," more than one said. "I hear it," more than one replied. Others said, "Yes, it's a painter."

By this time the panther was considerably nearer; in fact, near the house. It was circling and hollering. "It hollers like a woman," Daniel said. Others agreed that it hollered just like a woman. It would jump on a woman if cornered, and it would carry off a child. Woe be unto anything it could seize. Also woe be unto anything it sprung upon. Would the dogs run it? Just then the cur gave his own answer that *he* would. Jack and the grown boys ran out to the stables and by then Bill Glaze's cur had joined Jack's cur and a race was on. Bill Glaze's hound had come over and it joined Jack's hound and together they made a great noise on the trail; but they were afraid and would not *run* it. The panther circled for the Glaze Creek woods and would perhaps go to the river directly across from Daniel's house. Daniel and Sookie halfway decided to get their ginsing and go home. They couldn't carry it all, could they? Yes, they thought so.

While Daniel was out listening and hollering with the boys, the Waldrop boy got a chance alone and told Daniel what Jack Smith said when he saw him coming. Daniel said well, that he was going home anyway and now he certainly would. He found Sookie at the ginsing which she had rounded up and told her that they were going home, that the painter was circling that way. Then he got a chance and asked Jack if he said it. Jack said, "Well, I don't know whether I used exactly them words or not; but I said something like it." Daniel was sorry that he felt that way about it and that was all he said. The ginsing gatherers shouldered their sacks, which bore them down considerably, and lit a shuck after the curs and the panther. All the while Daniel was trying to unlodge the fishbone and Sookie was talking to him about it. He told her what Jack Smith had said. Thank God they could live at home. They didn't have to go see Jack Smith and Alice to get their something to eat.

The panther circled in the Glaze Creek woods a long time and finally struck out for the river at the point directly across from their house. They heard their own dogs join the two curs. They kept to the path, and in spite of a few stops to rest they reached the river as the dogs ran the panther up the river above the field. The dogs were hot in pursuit as they ran over the spot Daniel guessed to be the bank where his Cherokee wife and their child were buried. Daniel and Sookie reached the graves and lay down to rest, and listened to the dogs, wishing all the while that the dogs would tree

or catch the panther. In the moonlight night the long blades of grass, the green moss, deer's tongue, ginseng, ferns, the heartleaves, the plantains, wild hyacinths, and the violet plants which covered the bank and its graves—always in the shade—could be told by shape, feel, and smell.

But the dogs did not tree the panther and could not catch it. Finally they quit the chase and came back by the graves where Daniel and Sookie were. There was one thing Daniel had never told a living soul except his son Daniel. Young Daniel later told it to his boys and they in turn told it to an outsider. When Daniel saw the Cherokee girl and wanted her he had to run her down to catch her. He had to run her all over the place on both sides of the river and at last caught her on the bank where she now lay buried. She was willing to be his and became his on that bank. When their child died, she wanted the family graveyard started there. There was where she wanted to be buried. As Daniel prospered, he came to own all the land on both sides of the river where he had to run down the Cherokee maiden. Across the river from where Daniel and Sookie were lying out Daniel had five good houses. In the bend way up the river which he had bought at the land sales was where he and his young wife spent their honeymoon the next day and night. Ever since that day and night up there with her and nothing to interfere but the hum of the great woods, the sounds of the creatures, and the ripples on the rocks, he had been attached to that particular bend. There was where he had so many untouched ginseng beds.

Daniel would be old before he knew it but was still a very strong man so that he did not at the time mind meeting a black bear or a painter out in the woods. Except for Sookie, he would have been a broken man. As it was, much of the time he was a sad man notwithstanding his natural jovial spirits. But he kept it to himself for the most part. He could sit on his porch at home across the river where the four o'clocks were open and the martins asleep and see the clump of beeches and whiteoaks shading the bank where his Cherokee wife and their child lay. He knew that she died of a broken heart brought on when all her people were forced to go west. At least, he attributed it to that. His daughter and her husband and one of his boys had gone west to look for their mother's people and had found some of them. He had labored in Tuscaloosa and Cahaba

for more than one term in the interest of the Cherokees. More and more he had become embittered in his heart by the thought of the garden variety of life the whites always tried to advance to as he had experienced it in Charleston. He pitied the whites for their religion. It had come to be almost pointless to him. But he hated the hard hearts among them. But some white men like Tommy Lisper had hearts in them and were good to be with. And best of all, Sookie was like the women back in King Solomon's time.

They lay out together all night enjoying the moonlight night and the river, and the bank, and each other's company, and Daniel thought serious thoughts. The fishbone in his throat bothered him some but less than it had, and they decided it would eventually work out without serious consequences. At the first crack of day they pulled off their shoes and waded the river with half of the ginsing. They would come back for the other later. On their way up the hill path to the house they heard the chickens and guineas fly down out of the cedar trees. Daniel complained about the fishbone in his throat as Sookie started a fire from coals still alive deep in the ashes.

When the fire was blazing hot Sookie said, "Here, pull down your breeches and back up close to the fire."

"Why?"

"It makes no difference why. Do like I tell you."

Daniel obeyed.

Sookie got some tallow and warmed it and went to rubbing Daniel. "If it don't do you no good, it won't do you no harm," she said.

Daniel got to laughing and coughed up the fishbone.

And that day they spent a sweet Sunday together.

WHEN THE LIGHT GETS GREEN

Robert Penn Warren

MY GRANDFATHER had a long white beard and sat under the cedar tree. The beard, as a matter of fact, was not very long and not white, only gray, but when I was a child and was away from him at school during the winter, I would think of him, not seeing him in my mind's eye, and say, he has a long white beard. Therefore it was a shock to me, on the first morning back home, to watch him lean over the dresser toward the wavy green mirror, which in his always shadowy room reflected things like deep water riffled by a little wind, and clip his gray beard to a point. It is gray and pointed, I would say then, remembering what I had thought before.

He turned his face to the green wavy glass, first one side and then the other in quarter profile, and lifted the long shears, which trembled a little, up to cut the beard. His face being turned like that, with his good nose and pointed gray beard, he looked like General Robert E. Lee without any white horse to ride. My grandfather had been a soldier too, but now he wore blue-jean pants and when he leaned over like that toward the mirror I couldn't help but notice how small his hips and backsides were. Only they weren't just small, they were shrunken. I noticed how the blue-jeans hung loose from his suspenders and loose off his legs and down around his shoes. And in the morning when I noticed all this about his legs and backsides, I felt a tight feeling in my stomach like when you walk behind a woman and see the high heel of her shoe is worn and twisted and jerks her ankle every time she takes a step.

Always before my grandfather had finished clipping his beard, my Uncle Kirby came to the door and beat on it for breakfast.

"I'll be down in just a minute, thank you sir," my grandfather said. My uncle called him Mr. Barden. "Mr. Barden, breakfast is ready." It was because my Uncle Kirby was not my real uncle, having married my Aunt Lucy, who lived with my grandfather. Then my grandfather put on a black vest and put his gold watch and chain in the vest and picked up his cob pipe from the marble dresser top, and he and I went down to breakfast, after Uncle Kirby was already downstairs.

When we came into the dining room, Aunt Lucy was sitting at the foot of the table with the iron coffee pot on a plate beside her. She said, "Good morning, Papa."

"Good morning, Lucy," he said, and sat down at the head of the table, taking one more big puff off his pipe before laying it beside his plate.

"You've brought that old pipe down to breakfast again," my aunt said, while she poured the bright-looking coffee into the cups.

"Don't it stink," he always said.

My uncle never talked at breakfast, but when my grandfather said that, my uncle always opened his long lips to grin like a dog panting, and showed his hooked teeth. His teeth were yellow because he chewed tobacco, which my grandfather didn't do, although his beard was yellow around the mouth from smoking. Aunt Lucy didn't like my uncle to chew, that was the whole trouble. So she rode my grandfather for bringing his pipe down, all in fun at first before she got serious about it. But he always brought it down just the same, and said to her, "Don't it stink."

After we ate, my uncle got up, and said, "I got to get going," and went out through the kitchen where the cook was knocking and sloshing around. If it had rained right and was a good tobacco-setting season, my grandfather went off with me down to the stable to get his mare, for he had to see the setting. We saddled up the mare and went across the lot, where limestone bunched out of the ground and cedar trees and blue grass grew out of the split rock. A branch of cold water with minnows in it went through the lot between the rocks and under the cedar trees; it was where I used to play before I got big enough to go to the river with the niggers to swim.

My grandfather rode across the lot and over the rise back of the house. He sat up pretty straight for an old man, holding the bridle

in his left hand, and in his right hand a long hickory tobacco stick whittled down to make a walking cane. I walked behind him, and watched the big straw hat he wore waggle a little above his narrow neck, or how he held the stick in the middle, firm and straight up like something carried in a parade, or how smooth and slow the muscles in the mare's flanks worked as she put each hoof down on the ground going up the hill. Sassafras bushes and blackberry bushes grew thick along the lane over the rise. In summer tufts of hay would catch and hang on the dry bushes, and showed that the hay wagons had been that way; but when we went that way in setting time, just after breakfast, the blackberry blooms were hardly gone, only a few rusty patches of white left, and the sassafras leaves showed still wet with dew or maybe the rain.

From the rise we could look back on the house. The shingles were black with damp, and the whitewash grayish, except in spots where the sun already struck it and it was drying. The tops of the cedar trees, too, were below us, very dark green and quiet. When we crossed the rise, there were the fields going down toward the river, all checked off and ready for setting, very even, only for the gullies where brush was piled to stop the washing. The fields were reddish from the wet, not yet steaming. Across them, the green woods and the sycamores showing white far off told where the river was.

The hands were standing at the edge of the field under the trees when we got there. The little niggers were filling their baskets with the wet plants to drop, and I got me a basket and filled it. My Uncle Kirby gave me fifty cents for dropping plants, but he didn't give the little niggers that much, I remember. The hands and the women stood around waiting a minute, watching Uncle Kirby, who always fumed around, waving his dibble, his blue shirt already sticking to his arms with sweat. "Get the lead out," he said. The little niggers filled faster, grinning with their teeth at him. "Goddam, get the lead out!" My grandfather sat on his mare under the trees, still holding the walking cane, and said, "Why don't you start em, sir?"

Then, of a sudden, they all moved out into the field, scattering out down the rows, the droppers first, and after a minute the setters, who lurched along, never straightening up, down the rows toward the river. I walked down my row, separating out the plants and dropping them at the hills, while it got hotter and the ground steamed. The sun broke out now and then, making my shadow on

the ground, then the cloud would come again, and I could see its shadow on the red field drifting at me.

My grandfather rode very slow along the edge of the field to watch the setting, or stayed still under the trees. After a while, maybe about ten o'clock, he would leave and go home. I could see him riding the mare up the rise and then go over the rise; or if I was working the other way toward the river, when I turned round at the end, the lane would be empty and nothing on top the rise, with the cloudy blue-gray sky low behind it.

The tobacco was all he cared about, now we didn't have any horses that were any real good. He had some silver cups, only one real silver one though, that his horses won at fairs, but all that was before I was born. The real silver one, the one he kept on his dresser and kept string and old minnie balls and pins and things in, had 1859 on it because his horse won it then before the War, when he was a young man. Uncle Kirby said horses were foolishness, and grandfather said, yes, he reckoned horses were foolishness all right. So what he cared about now was the tobacco. One time he was a tobacco-buyer for three years, but after he bought a lot of tobacco and had it in his sheds, the sheds burned up on him. He didn't have enough insurance to do any good and he was a ruined man. After that all his children, he had all girls and his money was gone, said about him, "Papa's just visionary, he tried to be a tobacco-buyer but he's too visionary and not practical." But he always said, "All tobacco-buyers are sons-of-bitches, and three years is enough of a man's life for him to be a son-of-a-bitch, I reckon." Now he was old, the corn could get the rust or the hay get rained on for all he cared, it was Uncle Kirby's worry, but all summer off and on he had to go down to the tobacco field to watch them sucker or plow or worm, and sometimes he pulled a few suckers himself. And when a cloud would blow up black in summer, he got nervous as a cat, not knowing whether it was the rain they needed or maybe a hailstorm coming that would cut the tobacco up bad.

Mornings he didn't go down to the field he went out under the cedar tree where his chair was. Most of the time he took a book with him along with his pipe, for he was an inveterate reader. His being an inveterate reader was one of the things made his children say he was visionary. He read a lot until his eyes went bad the summer before he had his stroke, then after that, I read to him some, but

not as much as I ought. He used to read out loud some from Macaulay's *History of England* or Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*: about Flodden Field or about how the Janizaries took Constantinople amid great slaughter and how the Turk surveyed the carnage and quoted from the Persian poet about the lizard keeping the courts of the mighty. My grandfather knew some poetry too, and he said it to himself when he didn't have anything else to do. I lay on my back on the ground, feeling the grass cool and tickly on the back of my neck, and looked upside down into the cedar tree where the limbs were tangled and black-green like big hairy fern fronds with the sky blue all around, while he said some poetry. Like the "Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and sung"; or like "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll."

But he never read poetry, he just said what he already knew. He only read history and *Napoleon and his Marshals*, having been a soldier and fought in the War himself. He rode off and joined the cavalry, but he never told me whether he took the horse that won the real silver cup or not. He was with Forrest before Forrest was a general. He said Forrest was a great general, and if they had done what Forrest wanted and cleaned the country ahead of the Yankees, like the Russians beat Napoleon, they'd whipped the Yankees sure. He told me about Fort Donelson, how they fought in the winter woods, and how they got away with Forrest at night, splashing through the cold water. And how the dead men looked in the river bottoms in winter, and I lay on my back on the grass, looking up in the thick cedar limbs, and thought how it was to be dead.

After Shiloh was fought and they pushed the Yankees down in the river, my grandfather was a captain, for he raised a cavalry company of his own out of West Tennessee. He was a captain, but he never got promoted after the War; when I was a little boy everybody still called him Captain Barden, though they called lots of other people in our section Colonel and Major. One time I said to him: "Grandpa, did you ever kill any Yankees?" He said: "God-er-mighty, how do I know?" So, being little, I thought he was just a captain because he never killed anybody; and I was ashamed. He talked about Fort Pillow, and the drunk niggers under the bluff. And one time he said niggers couldn't stand a charge or stand the cold steel, so I thought maybe he killed some of them. But then I thought, niggers don't count, maybe.

He only talked much in the morning. Almost every afternoon right after dinner, he went to sleep in his chair, with his hands curled up in his lap, one of them holding the pipe that still sent up a little smoke in the shadow, and his head propped back on the tree trunk. His mouth hung open, and under the hairs of his mustache, all yellow with nicotine, you could see his black teeth and his lips that were wet and pink like a baby's. Usually I remember him that way, asleep.

I remember him that way, or else trampling up and down the front porch, nervous as a cat, while a cloud blew up and the trees began to rustle. He tapped his walking cane on the boards and whistled through his teeth with his breath and kept looking off at the sky where the cloud and sometimes the lightning was. Then of a sudden it came, and if it was rain he used to go up to his room and lie down; but if it came hail on the tobacco, he stayed on the front porch, not trampling any more, and watched the hail rattle off the roof and bounce soft on the grass. "God-er-mighty," he always said, "bigger'n minnie balls"; even when it wasn't so big.

In 1914, just before the war began, it was a hot summer with the tobacco mighty good but needing rain. And when the dry spell broke and a cloud blew up, my grandfather came out on the front porch, watching it like that. It was mighty still, with lightning way off, so far you couldn't hardly hear the thunder. Then the leaves began to ruffle like they do when the light gets green, and my grandfather said to me, "Son, it's gonna hail." And he stood still. Down in the pasture, little that far off, you could see the cattle bunching up and the white horse charging across the pasture, looking bright, for the sun was shining bright before the cloud struck it all at once. "It's gonna hail," my grandfather said. It was dark, with jagged lightning and the thunder high and steady. And there the hail was.

He just turned around and went in the house. I watched the hail bouncing, then I heard a noise and my aunt yelled. I ran back in the dining room where the noise was, and my grandfather was lying on the floor with the old silver pitcher he dropped and dented and the glass he had started to drink out of broken. We tried to drag him, but he was too heavy, then my Uncle Kirby came up wet from the stable, so we carried my grandfather upstairs and put him

on his bed. My aunt tried to call the doctor even if the lightning might hit the telephone. I stayed back in the dining room and picked up the broken glass and the pitcher and wiped up the floor with a rag. After a while Dr. Blake came from town, then he went away.

When Dr. Blake was gone I went upstairs to see my grandfather. I shut the door and went in his room, which was almost dark, like always, and quiet because the hail didn't beat on the roof any more. He was lying on his back in the featherbed, with a sheet pulled up over him, lying there in the dark. He had his hands curled loose on his stomach, like when he went to sleep in his chair holding the pipe. I sat on a split-bottom chair by the bed and looked at him: he had his eyes shut and his mouth hung loose, but you couldn't hear his breathing. Then I quit looking at him and looked round the room, my eyes getting used to the shadow. I could see his pants on the floor, and the silver cup on the dresser by the mirror, which was green and wavy like water.

When he said something I almost jumped out of my skin, hearing his voice like that. He said: "Son, I'm gonna die." I tried to say something, but I couldn't. And he waited, then he said: "I'm on borrowed time, it's time to die." I said, "No!" so sudden and loud I jumped. He waited a long time and said: "It's time to die. Nobody loves me." I tried to say, "Grandpa, I love you." And then I did say it all right, feeling like it hadn't been me said it, and knowing all of a sudden it was a lie, because I didn't feel anything. He just lay there; and I went downstairs.

It was sunshiny in the yard, the clouds gone, but the grass was wet. I walked down toward the gate, rubbing my bare feet over the slick cold grass. A hen was in the yard and she kept trying to peck up a piece of hail, like a fool chicken will do after it hails; but every time she pecked, it bounced away from her over the green grass. I leaned against the gate, noticing the ground on one side the posts, close up, was still dry and dusty. I wondered if the tobacco was cut up bad, because Uncle Kirby had gone to see. And while I looked through the gate down across the pasture where everything in the sun was green and shiny with wet and the cattle grazed, I thought about my grandfather, not feeling anything. But I said out loud anyway: "Grandpa, I love you."

My grandfather lived four more years. The year after his stroke

they sold the farm and moved away, so I didn't stay with them any more. My grandfather died in 1918, just before the news came my Uncle Kirby was killed in France, and my aunt had to go to work in a store. I got the letter about my grandfather, who died of flu, but I thought about four years back, and it didn't matter much.

WM. CRANE

Manson Radford

A FEW NEGRO CHILDREN, happy in the dust, stirred a little idle movement along the unpaved block. A white man, at one end, was knocking at each of the low, weathered houses that lay huddled in the sun. Like a marionette dancing he walked across the bright scene. Knock, wait, move down one. He worked rapidly with an air of clear intention. If the front door on the gallery was shuttered he would not trouble to knock. The space between each house and the next formed an alley, behind a closed door that rose above his head. When he pulled at the wooden handle of a bell wire running through the door jamb and along the house to the rear, a bell tinkled or rattled distantly. The sound died, and if there was no response or the shuffle of no feet within, he pushed open the door. With his fist he would pound on the clapboard side of the house until the disturbance echoed and re-echoed through every room. Sometimes he would chuckle at the sign on so many doors—"Beware Bad Dog." It amused him to think of strangers, and himself so recently, rendered cautious with a little paint.

At one house near the center of the block it was not necessary to announce himself, and he was pleased.

"Well, well, well," he said, "that's fine. Here you are. Luck for both of us. Luck for you and luck for me."

He took his hat off and wiped his forehead in the steaming sun. He was standing on the sidewalk, but the gallery was so small that he spoke in a conversational tone. She leaned on her elbows watching him through the open window and he could see her weak breasts under the sleazy print she wore.

"Doggone if I wasn't wondered what had become of you," he continued, coming up onto the gallery. "Didn't know but what you'd got yourself another man and gone away. I didn't know,"

he grinned at her. "You never can tell these days what the women'll do. Isn't that right . . . Mary?"

The set of her face broke under the pressure of his patter; changed, shifted itself, but no expression came.

"Mary . . ." The name hung on one finger exploring the fatness of his debit book, "Ah. Here she is. No . . . Marie. Marie Dufouchard, Widow. That's it, isn't it? Or which are you? Mary or Marie or eeny, meeny, meiny, moe?" When he laughed he opened his mouth wide, so that his regular teeth and cropped red mustache and black tortoise-shell glasses seemed all one thing. They matched themselves like lead soldiers marching in bright colors.

For he was neat. If his seersucker suit was frayed a little at the cuffs, it had been properly laundered and was still clean. In his carriage and in his dress he indicated himself as a man with a wary eye. Here and there he had been forced to surrender a point or two, but with the proper honors. He never would be caught unawares by time and routed—by no fair means. His gray hair had begun to thin but it was plastered back courageously without grease and his belt checked at his waist a tendency toward flesh. If the conflict appeared in his face, in the prim eyes and obscure mouth, the answer was politely concealed. Or at least decently covered—by activity and a simple spirit.

He pushed open the door and entered the room. She turned to face him and he saw how thin she was. Her body was drawn until there were hardly any breasts and no arms, beyond bone and a little tight skin. Even the nostrils curled back like dead magnolias rotted blue. Hell, he wondered. Proper niggers are fat—or laughing. Under its immediate concern his mind was groping. And he remembered a sensation, without the image, of the empty eyes of staring children. Or some similar time when his words caught on nothing and hung nowhere.

"Yes, Sir. Now let's see. Here we are. It is a nice name, come to think of it. Paid . . . paid . . . paid . . ." He flipped the pages with one hand while he held the book, that was thicker than his fist, in the other.

"Well . . . you are a good one. Never behind at all until just lately. Something a person ought to be proud of, I don't mind telling you at all." He spoke pleasantly, not pressing her for any response when she did not answer. She was still standing where she

had turned from the window, but now not even watching him. Instead her eyes strayed, anywhere away from the strange face that was in her bedroom. He had taken one of the soiled overstuffed chairs and put his hat on the small table beside him.

He was almost startled when she spoke, or it may have been her sudden movement.

"Mis' Bougereaux done gone?" she said distantly and carelessly, so that the inflection dropped between a question and a statement. Her words were barely a separate thing from the disjointed swing of her body as she moved across the room.

"Bougereaux?" He was puzzled, holding one finger to mark his point on the page. "Oh . . . him. He sure is, lady. That's my job now. Though maybe you and me'd both be lot better off where he is. Unless St. Peter's trying to collect a debit on him." He laughed entirely, all over, at his joke, and then laughed again to include her.

He asked to see her card indicating the records of her payments and she brought it to him. She kept it in one of the drawers of the low dresser and she had to rummage far back to find it. She laid it down on the table with a one dollar bill and a quarter. It was ruled evenly in horizontal spaces, with divisions for the date, the amount of each payment, and the agent's name. He looked at the money on the table and, taking out his fountain pen, he signed his name with the easy flourish of the professional five times. It was always a pleasure when he received so many payments at once. His name was not long and the *Wm. Cranes*, one above the other, formed a neat solid block, very different from the illegible *Bougereauxs* above.

"Okay, sister, there she is." He flipped the card back to her across the room. "Now you've got to watch yourself and don't get behind again. I tell you, you'd feel mighty bad to lose a fine policy like that."

"Look, 'yere. You ain't fix me right," she said, before he could record the payments. She studied the card intently. "You say I'se two weeks a'hind you yet. You ain't fix this card right." She brought the card over for him to see.

He waved her away, that she might not interfere with the entries he was making. "Of course it's right. Five quarters—five weeks."

"No, it ain't neither." She held her ground, still absorbed with the simplicities of the card. "They's two times you gotta sign yet."

"Now look here," he snapped his debit book shut and took the

card from her. He explained, cheerfully regarding the black face before him. He ran over simply for her the regulations of the company. Bougereaux, he said, had paid two weeks for her. With the five that she was behind, that made seven. She had just made up five, leaving two. When he spoke it was with a confidential air and he addressed her personally as though the two together were joined against the powers of confusion and officialdom. Bougereaux had been trying to help her, he had lent her money of his own and it must be repaid. He did not attempt to conceal that it was to the agent's advantage to lend money when there was a chance of saving the policy. Honesty, he had often said, was the best policy; square and aboveboard with everybody and a man will learn to read a bank book, was the way he used to express it.

"An' you gonna fix it?" she asked when he had finished. He was exasperated. She spoke simply, as though merely to indicate polite attention to his words.

"Now! Now, Marie." He began again. "You must listen. You're not as dumb as that. Money is money, you know that. When you borrow, you must pay it back."

She looked at him attentively and with interest for the first time. Slowly her features softened into a grin that exposed her discolored teeth, as though she were at last satisfied and pleased at the result of her scrutiny. Before she spoke she looked away and started to chuckle until she was almost laughing.

"Shuh," she said and then again. "Shuh. Fo' bits t'a de'd ma'n!" Her amusement rippled through her words and spilled over, seeming to lose itself in the room, until she focused it quickly for him in a simple grin. Irresistibly he was forced to join her and to smile.

But he checked himself and spoke sharply. He explained again that though she only owed the company five quarters, she owed Bougereaux the two that he had paid for her. And that since he was acting in Bougereaux's place it was his duty to collect the debt and see that the money was disposed of properly. When he paused she still inspected his face closely with oblique eyes.

"So you see?" he continued. "I can't sign the two weeks for you. It would be wrong. And that's all there is to it. But now don't you worry. You'll make that little up in no time at all and you'll be all jake again."

When he finished, she turned her eyes away from his face and

then her body more slowly, and walked across the room to the door.

"God dam' cheatin' w'ite ma'n," she said with her back to him. She mumbled her words passionately but experimentally, as though she were addressing an indifferent god. ". . . a cheatin' w'ite ma'n." At the door she turned and stood before it with crossed arms. He could not tell if she were waiting for him to speak or whether she intended to bar the door.

"Here, here now. You." He addressed her sternly. "Don't you go talking like that. You got to keep a civil tongue in your head. That's no way to talk to anybody." He held his body together fiercely and glared at her, as some men hold a poker hand when the bets are all in.

She mumbled, "Ain' talkin' to nobody," and relaxing, he indicated that he accepted it, with her hesitating eyes, as an apology.

"All right. I can't stop here all morning. I got a lot of business. Have you got any receipts from Bougereaux? If you haven't I can't help that and I can't sign your card."

"Receipts?" she repeated as though it were a new idea in her mind. "Maybe I has. I'll look where it is the papers are."

She rummaged again in the low dresser but discovered nothing. Leaving the room, she picked up the dollar that still lay on the table. He could hear her in the rear opening and closing drawers. When she returned she shook her head.

"Very well," he said and put on his hat. He slipped the quarter from the table and dropped it into the canvas bag that he wore at his waist. "Now give me that dollar and you'll be settled up for today."

"Dol'ah?" she asked leaning against the door into the rear room. "Done paid my dol'ah. You got it there. An' you ain' goin' to cheat me, w'ite ma'n. You goin' to fix that card right too."

He cursed her then. He stood by the table shaking his fist at her and shouting until his voice died away slowly while his eyes picked up the short-barreled revolver. The muzzle of the gun was a few feet in front of his eyes and the light glinted around the edges of the barrel so that the bore was a black perfect circle. When he thought of it afterwards he had always the feeling that he ought to have touched the woman, ought to have put his hands on her violently in some way. But he could not even see her then. He never saw her eyes, nor understood exactly the words she used. He heard her

laughing hysterically and he knew that the names she was calling him were obscene.

"You better put down that gun," he said, words returning with his body as he moved. "You don't dare use it. Put down that gun!" he said again, "and stop this nonsense!"

When he stepped toward her it was without intention other than to emphasize his words. He heard the hammer strike and saw the muzzle twitch upward at the same time. The separate sensations confused him for an instant and he could not immediately join the two into comprehension. He saw her black face then, brilliant in its steady rage, at the same moment he understood that she had tried to shoot him. Fear and anger surged over him so that the two were indistinguishable, separating his body from feeling or will. He did not realize that he was running until the returning houses grew black in the street and he forced himself to stop. It was not until after he had put in a call for the police from the grocery on the corner that he began to wonder if he had been struck.

There was nobody there when they returned and seeing the room again, so dull and cheap and empty, he felt a little weak. The taller officer went through the door into the rear and he helped himself into the soft, soiled chair where he had been sitting to talk with her before. With a gun . . . she had tried to kill him. Not over fifty cents. There must have been something else, and besides he had been right about that. He wanted to assist the officers in some way, but there was nothing he could think of to do. He explained how it happened over again to the one called Shorty, who was searching the room, pulling all the bedclothes apart and turning out all the drawers without bothering to put anything back. They did not look like very efficient police. Rather like indifferent railroad conductors. Shorty had a great belly that made him ridiculous on his knees peering under the bed. Were the police in all Southern cities like that, he wondered. And impudent . . . she had been impudent too, and had called him filthy names. Though she had been hysterical then. But trying to kill him . . . it was madness. The thought disturbed him for a moment. He tried to think carefully, but he could not recall any evidence of insanity in her conversation with him. He would testify to that. She had been entirely normal. He could take oath on that.

When the taller officer returned he brought the negro woman

by the arm and pushed her into a chair by the door. At the sight of her he felt himself grow excited again and his eyes grasped eagerly at the face he could not remember. He felt that before she was sentenced to her punishment he must know exactly what she looked like and what she was. But sullenly she kept her head down. She was sobbing a little without tears and he heard, for the first time, a child crying in the rear. He realized that he was sitting strained, awkwardly in the chair, and he made himself lean back. He felt a little foolish and angry with the police for not taking her away and getting the whole thing over with.

"Nothing in here," Shorty said, sitting on the rumpled bed. "You find anything?" The other shook his head and they both looked at him.

"She pulled a gun on you? You sure?"

He explained to them again, carefully. She had tried to kill him. She had pointed a gun at him and pulled the trigger. The hammer had clicked. But the gun had failed to fire. It was a thirty-eight.

"A thirty-eight?" The fat man on the bed seemed interested for the first time. "How do you know it was?"

He could not think about that clearly. He repeated that it was a thirty-eight, he knew.

"Maybe it wasn't loaded?" the other said, idly, still standing by the negress. "Maybe she just got worked up and thought to scare you a bit? Eh? What about it you . . . ?" He poked her in the arm. "You. What's your name. Come on, say something."

Her name was Marie, Marie Dufouchard, he told them again.

"Well, what about it, Mary?" the tall one continued not ungently. "Come on. We don't want no trouble now. Open that black mouth of yours."

She seemed to be considering with herself, miserably.

"It's lying," she said finally in a low voice, without raising her eyes. "It's all lyin'. I never. He's a cheatin' ma'n." She looked up suddenly and straight at him so that he had to drop his eyes. She spoke out.

"He done stole a dol'ah an' fix my cah'd like I never paid him. He's lyin' and fixin' to take my in'suh'nce."

He heard the crack of her head as it hit the back of the chair. He sat up suddenly, rigid. Her eyes were wider than any he had ever seen and her mouth stood partly opened in stupid fear. He could

see across her lips and over half her cheek, even through the black of her skin, the wide marks where the open palm had struck. Fearfully she made no sound. The man by her seemed hardly to have moved. And neither of them looked at him. They waited silently, watching her without interest.

He lost control of himself after that. Leaping to his feet he shouted at them. He cursed them for brutal louts. Goddam dirty bums unfit to be policemen. Why didn't they take her to jail? That was their business. Who did they think they were, beating women and obstructing justice? He'd report them, by Christ, he said, if it was the last living thing he did. Let them get stuck in a cell with a nigger woman and see how they'd like that!

But his hysteria passed quickly, finding no response. The excitement that had induced it left him weak and uncertain on his feet, so that he had to support himself with one hand on the arm of the chair. The taller one said, "You take him outside, Shorty."

The fresh air helped him and after they reached the precinct station he felt better able to act in a dignified manner. When the desk sergeant charged the woman with disorderly conduct and asked him if there were anything else he controlled himself. He repeated his version of the story again and said simply that it seemed to him considerably more than a matter of disorderly conduct. Shorty came forward to explain that the woman wouldn't talk and that they had not been able to find any gun. But he laid a cartridge on the desk for the sergeant to see. They had found it on the floor as they were leaving, he said. It was a thirty-eight and there was an indentation in the primer where the firing pin had struck without discharging it. The sergeant held it in his fingers, turning it slowly around to catch the light from all sides, and rubbing it on his sleeve to inspect the indentation. He nodded his head then in confirmation and wrote down "assault with attempt to kill."

"Okay," he said, "that's it, I reckon."

But it was not to be so after all. When he reached the office the District Manager was quite firm, pointing out that the company could not afford to incur any ill will. And a colored preacher called that night who spoke very earnestly of the economic and cultural position of the negro people, and offered to make arrangements about Marie.

Afterward it often astonished him to think how quickly every-

thing had changed. He wrote three new policies the first day in that one block. He would have walked by Marie's house without stopping. But she came out to speak to him, calling from the little gallery as he stood in the street. She was dressed in the same dirty cotton she had worn before and her black eyes and mouth watched him thoughtfully. The Rev. Jones had fixed it for her to move, she said.

"So's I won't bother you no more," and she grinned at him.

She asked if he would please see that her policy was transferred to the new district, and, when he said that he would, she thanked him.

THE FACE

Louis Moreau

THE HUBS made a hollow knocking sound as our wagon rolled down the road in monotony. My mother sat beside me on the front seat of our canvas-covered wagon. We were in the hills of east Texas and were moving toward south Louisiana. A tub of hot coals set upon four brickbats in the wagon bed made us comfortable.

To our left was a small patch of plowed ground, separated from the road by a rail fence. Not far beyond this stood a strip of naked trees through which the sun could be seen as it sank near the horizon, a huge ball of yellow fire. There was no sound except the squeak of harness and the noise of the wagon rolling slowly along.

Farther ahead there was more plowed ground. A pair of horses' heads could be seen over the rail fence. At that place two men were leaning against the fence and were talking to each other across it.

"I wonder if the man is telling your father we are on the wrong road," said my mother.

"I hope not," I answered.

"Let us talk about something cheerful, Son."

"Are you afraid?"

My mother did not answer but shrugged her shoulders and kept looking ahead at the two men talking at the fence. She seemed enveloped in some feeling all her own. She had spells of despondency I could not quite understand.

I looked at her out of the corner of my eye, for I feared she would begin again. She was not skinny and nervous-looking, as most women are who get on your nerves with their petty fears. She was stout and vigorous-looking and her eyes were calm, sometimes dreamy. Although we once lived in the Bayou Jack country, where there were ferocious beasts, and she was not afraid to live there,

yet I have seen her upset over trifles. What makes her that way? I would think.

"Won't you be glad when we get back home and you can go hunting in the swamp with your father, and we can eat peaches and figs out of our trees in the yard? You don't remember our home very well, do you, Son?"

"Not very."

"Well, our home is—well, it is just home," she said, trying to be gay. "Don't you remember the time that we thought you were lost and your grandfather found you asleep in the cornfield?"

"How old was I?"

"Three. You little crocodile, we've been gone eleven years." Then with dreamy eyes she was silent. "Wouldn't you like to see your grandfather again?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I know he will be glad to see us."

The monotonous thudding of the wheels reigned again for a moment; then my mother said in a lonely voice, "Isn't it funny about home, how everything wants to go back to it. Is it magic?"

I sat there not paying much attention to her, listening to the wagon hubs as the wagon lumbered on, feeling as though a burden was upon me as long as she talked.

My father, whom we were nearing, stood up straight, faced us, and twirled his mustache. I thought I could see the gleam in his gray-blue eyes.

When we drew near he called out to me to stop and said: "We are among friends from our home parish." Then, addressing the man who stood on the other side of the fence, he said, "This is my big family, my wife and my son."

The man's name was George Monin.

He and my parents talked for a while; then he started unhitching his horses. My father said to me, "You may start your snails over the hill. We will be waiting for you beyond it."

On the far side of the hill was a narrow lane which followed a winding creek leading west of the road. My father and his friend had passed us and were waiting there. We all followed the lane and shortly came to a three-room, unpainted house, almost hidden behind a bend in the line of trees. This house was even more lonely than the road.

The man's wife was thin, and careworn. She held out her hand to my mother, then embraced her and wept, as all women who have lived in the lonely hills of Texas weep when meeting a stranger.

"They are from Avoyelles and speak French!" her husband said. At this she redoubled her tears for joy. After a while the two women were talking and laughing.

"Let me unhitch your team," said our friend to my father. He busied himself at this courtesy and would not let me or my father help him. He was so glad to see us that it seemed he could not do enough for us.

Then as he worked I observed his face. It was flushed red from excitement. But I perceived something peculiar about it, since I was free to examine it without his noticing me.

In my childhood fancy I thought the face looked the way it did for a purpose. Although he could not have been more than forty-two, he was wrinkled, but his wrinkles were not those of sun, dust, or wind. I saw on closer observation that the reddish tint was a natural one only darkened by the stimulation of blood to his face. The cheekbones were high and flat. The eyes were bulging and restless; the mouth was nervous. It was such a face as I have seen in nightmares in which the monster was gentle and of good intent.

Soon after dark we were eating the simple but wholesome meal of a country home: chicken gumbo, rice, long slices of homemade bread with sweet milk, which Mrs. Monin served to us out of a large bowl.

Somewhat restless, perhaps, because of the peaceful atmosphere, and the uninteresting conversation about crops and the weather, I sought escape by examining the interior of the dining room. Over the fireplace, in which was a low fire, hung an old-fashioned picture. On the mantel I saw an old-fashioned clock that was not running. Then I found myself counting the doors, three of them, one opening into the kitchen, another giving access to the side porch, and a third, which led into the sitting room. Over each of these hung a large rifle.

We got up after supper and went into the living room, where a warm fire burned in the hearth. My mother walked in just ahead of my father. "Have you asked Mr. Monin about the road?" she said.

"Why, yes—I had forgotten to tell you—we are off the main road, but can regain it by cutting across a wood about a day's drive from here."

My mother sighed contentedly and soon was engaged in talking to Mrs. Monin.

I sat near the men.

"How long have you been away from Louisiana?" my father asked George Monin.

"Eleven years."

"So have I."

"Avoyelles is all right, I guess," said George Monin looking fixedly into the fire.

My father said, "It's got its good and its bad."

They went on talking about a wealthy doctor there who owned nearly all the land, who made nearly all the money, owned a large cotton gin, and swindled all the farmers.

"He was worse than Nick Reshaum," said my father.

"A lot worse."

"Nick got sent to the pen about the time we left there, didn't he?"

"Right after that," said George Monin. And my father said, "I heard he had escaped."

"He did, after a couple of months."

"Did you ever know him?"

"No, but I knew a brother of his, a blacksmith."

"So did I. Melville?"

"Yes, Melville, the blacksmith," answered George Monin.

"Melville used to trade at my store," said my father. "Pretty straight guy."

"Melville was as square-shooting a man as I want to meet. He wasn't anything at all like Nick. Didn't even look like him."

"He used to help Nick break out of jail," my father added.

"One time he forged a key just like the jail key and gave it to Nick when Nick was in jail. That way, Nick could get out at night and come back before daybreak. If Melville had made him stay in he might've made a man out of him. Melville was too good."

"But that Nick!" said my father.

"Yeh, that Nick!" And the two men laughed.

"Did you ever hear about the night he got married?"

"He eloped on a stolen horse with a brand new saddle and blanket on it."

My father laughed. "Some devil of a man for that peace-loving

country. I heard he'd had a scuffle with Sheriff Tom Butler when he had escaped jail and Tom caught him and took him back. When they got to the cell he threw Tom down, picked him up and threw him in the cell; then he locked him in and took the key off with him. They had to break the door to get Tom Butler out. Some people say he killed a guard in escaping the penitentiary."

George Monin's face looked strange in the fire and lamplight. It was strange to see his bulging eyes sparkling with humor. "Some devil!" he said, and he and my father laughed and the sound of their voices seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer. The room was growing stuffy. I could barely keep my eyes open. Soon I was asleep.

The next morning my mother awoke me at sunrise. "Get up and eat," she said; "we will soon be leaving."

My father and George Monin were in the lot hitching the wagon. In nearly an hour we were climbing in, ready to leave. It was as though with our departure there would come a calamity to the Monins. As my mother started to step up into the wagon, the lonely, careworn little woman threw her arms about her neck and began to sob like a child. Her husband, a look of wistful sadness on his red face, stood by not knowing what to do or say. My father came up to him and offered his hand. George Monin took it and with a heavy voice said, "Please . . . do stay longer . . . couldn't you stay one more day?"

My father shook his head with a kindly smile. "I wish we could stay longer, Mr. Monin, but we've been on the road for three weeks, already."

George Monin slapped my father on the shoulder. He had a pitiful expression on his face. "Wait a minute," he said, and went off toward the smokehouse. He returned with a bundle of fresh sausage which he had wrapped for us in some thick paper. "You might need this when you get home," he laughed, then added, "to remember me by."

He opened the gate and we passed onto the road. As we went by him I caught a lasting impression of his face. Somehow I felt that that face would follow me through life—looking for something I had.

Once more the hubs knocked with the wheels rolling toward home. Late that afternoon we camped at a spot which had been designated as being four miles from the edge of the wood.

The next morning my father said to my mother, "Where are"

those buckshot shells?" My mother began searching under some things.

"What do you want them for?" I asked him.

"Safety."

"Is it—p-panthers?"

"Hush, Son," my mother interposed; "you were born in a panther country."

We lost the way three times because the tracks left by the rare traffic were so dim. At these times we were rather uneasy, for men have been known to get lost and die of distraction and starvation in places much smaller than this. At almost sundown we came to an open place which showed no connection with the forest. "We are out of the wilderness," my father said, then pointing ahead, "There is the road. In three days we will be in Louisiana."

We drove the wagon off the road and stopped on the bank of a creek, to camp for the night. With nothing about us but naked trees, a creek, the setting sun, the vacant, chilly atmosphere, and perhaps because we so suddenly found ourselves without any visible obstacles, I did not know how to feel. As I helped my father unhitch and put the blankets on the horses I looked over and saw my mother sitting in the back of the wagon, looking down into the tub of hot coals.

I went over and said to her, "Do you feel bad, Mamma?"

"No," she answered.

"Are you thinking about home?"

"No."

"Then, Mamma, why do you sit like that, without anything to say? . . . Are you sad?"

"Go and get me some hickory branches for the tub, Son," she said calmly.

Dusk began to fall and to envelop our solitary little camp with gloom. I went and got the wood and brought it to her. Then I put some oats for the horses in a trough fastened behind the wagon. I called them and they came and ground up the oats between their teeth with monotonous crunching.

I thought I heard a sound on the road. I looked there and saw a buggy stopping, with a man in it peering at us through the trees. After a while he turned his horse and drove off the road in our direction.

It was George Monin.

"Hello, there!" exclaimed my father going to him. The man got out of the buggy. He had not said a word.

"What brings you here?" asked my father.

"My friend," replied George Monin with an uneasy sigh, "you see me in trouble."

"Yes?"

Just then my mother who had been inside the wagon came out. "Why, hello, Mr. ——"

"Doesn't it occur to you who I am?" the man was saying.

My father thought a while, then looked into his face. His lips flickered with a smile of familiarity. For a moment it seemed as though a grin strayed over George Monin's face.

"You are Nick Reshaum," said my father.

"I am."

The words mingled with the crunching of oats in the horse trough. After some hesitation the man who had spoken them looked up at the bare trees, then down at his toes. "You know—of course—there's a price on my head—a thousand dollars, I think," he said haltingly.

My father laughed. "Ha! Nick, I wouldn't turn you in for my wagon full of money."

With tears streaming down his cheeks and his face suffused with mingled joy and sadness, Nick Reshaum bowed his head, repeating, "My friends—my friends . . ."

He was in a hurry to go back home to his wife, but my parents prevailed upon him to stay with us. That night in the dim lamplight under the wagon canvas he told us his story. I don't remember all of it. Perhaps it was fatigue, perhaps it was the oily smell of the lamp, or the look in his face that made me forget most of the story and go to sleep before it was finished. I can only remember that he spoke of loneliness in his boyhood, of stealing, of switching cattle brands. I remember he said to my father, "You're a square-shooter. I've known you a long time but you haven't known me. I've heard a lot of good things about you. That's why I trust you . . . I've learned that jails and penitentiaries are not the only prisons a man can be in . . . Some day they'll hang me, I know . . ."

The next morning when I awoke my father was standing by our horses, and was looking toward the road. I thought of our friend and

looked about me. I did not see him. My father said something to my mother and she made an exclamation such as a woman makes when she is both shocked and hurt.

"Where is he—what has happened?" I cried out.

"He is gone," said my father calmly. There was a heavy look on his face.

"Did he take anything?" I asked.

"Nothing but his horse and buggy," said my father.

"Oh, Son, how could you!" my mother exclaimed to me; and she hid her face and sobbed, "He has gone like this—into those woods—in the dark . . ."

Oftentimes while my mother was ironing, or when she was bent over the stove, and I had just thrown an armful of wood into the wood box, she has looked at me and said in her tender, wistful, voice, "I wonder if Mr. Reshaum ever got through those woods, or if a panther killed him. Do you think, perhaps, he got lost and died away out there alone with his horse?"

"I don't know, Mamma," I would answer, "but wasn't he a queer man, wasn't his face the most peculiar thing you ever saw?"

"Wasn't it!" my mother would say; "I think I would like to forget him, but somehow I can't. I wonder what makes us remember people though we try to forget them. Can't you tell me that, Son?"

Where anyone else would have been merely surprised or astonished she had been heartbroken and permanently impressed. I felt very near her.

Fifteen years after that my mother died.

As the years are passing I am gradually forgetting Nick Reshaum—the man—but his face will never leave me. As in my childhood I am yet bewildered before it. And while his face is there in my thoughts, I think I feel something present about me, and I am shaken with a violent and tragic desire to be again near that which is tender, and comforting—but impossible to reach. Then I am swept back into the deceitful materiality about me. And, here, let me digress to contend that substance is faithless; in it my senses lead me about as a blind man—and I am deceived; for here is something I can lay my hand upon and feel, and it is proved a fraud;

but yonder is a dream, a desire, or yet a faint image only touched by the last sigh of sad memory—and I am drawn to it as though by some overpowering machine of the Universe—

Nick Reshaum, what has become of you!

THE HORN THAT CALLED BAMBINE

Elma Godchaux

WHEN I was a child, I used to hear Shoolie blow his horn. I used to feel sorry for Shoolie. When I grew to be a woman, I could still hear that horn sounding, and felt the same old sadness filling me up and choking me. It was always at sunset time that I heard the horn, when I was coming home from the field, dead-tired, feeling my heavy head and arms and the straight line of pain at the back of my neck as I dragged along. I heard Shoolie's horn and raised my head and looked over the cotton field and a green patch of cane, hunting for Shoolie, though I knew he wasn't there; I knew his horn was blowing in my head. I sighed, thinking of the things Shoolie had saved me from and the things he had brought me. Shoolie always liked me. But I never did nothing for Shoolie. I kept on down the road, thinking, and took the rise, thinking and hearing Shoolie's horn. The Lowell-sack full of cotton was awful heavy on my shoulder. I pulled it along and coughed, trying to get the dry cotton dust out of my throat. I felt my skirt sticking to my legs when I bent my knees, working up the rise. I couldn't never get used to the hill between my house and the cotton field, though I didn't know how many times I had climbed it from the field. Dan didn't think nothing of my climbing it. Dan didn't think much. He never thought why I couldn't get used to working in the field and lugging an old Lowell-sack. Mamma and Papa never believed in sending their girls to the fields. They said field work wasn't for white girls; if you were a nigger, it was different. Oh God, I thought, nobody couldn't tell what he might come to. Mamma and Papa would turn over in their graves, seeing me dragging the cotton. I kept on going, thinking if it hadn't been for Shoolie, maybe I

wouldn't be harnessed to a Lowell-sack like a nigger. I heard his horn. But the blasts didn't sound full no more, though, as if he was moving off or getting tired blowing. He used to get awful tired. He used to say he got tired enough to drop dead and his mouth hurt him. I used to wish he would stop, because I knew there wasn't no use in his blowing like that. But he wouldn't listen.

The blasts I heard were faint, faint. Then one of Fred Turner's fat white roosters hopped on the fence rail and crowed and killed Shoolie's horn; it was blotted out as if it had never been. Everything was quiet. Fred Turner's house looked bare and lonesome. It was a two-story house stuck on top of the hill. The whole world was beneath it. Far below it, the Turner pear trees and some bamboo made a blurry darkness; nothing grew near it. I could make out Mrs. Turner sitting on the gallery in one of the two rocking chairs, rocking. I lowered my head and hurried on and got into the darkness of the big black oak and let out my breath. She was perched up there like she was sitting in a tower. She was rocking and rocking, nervous. I could hear her heels clicking. I coughed. Seemed to me, I could see her red eyes from where I was. They were always as red as blood. I wished I didn't have to see her or Fred or the house of theirs neither. I wondered were Mrs. Turner's eyes red from crying or because she ate morphine. She measured out her morphine on her long black fingernails. Everybody knew how she did it as good as if they seen her do it. Me and Dan often talked about her. He'd talk and talk until I got up and went about my business because I couldn't stand so much talk. He'd talk about Shoolie too. Talk about Miss Maime and Fred always led to talk about Shoolie. I wished I could forget them. But some things nobody forgot, things that marked lives the way trees and bushes marked roads and made them different from other roads. Shoolie and Fred had marked my life. I wondered if all the folks I knew had markers in their lives that I couldn't see. I stole another glance at Miss Maime. My sweat felt cold. None of us could see Miss Maime without a tremble, Miss Maime, we all called her since as far back as I could remember. She was some older than Fred Turner and looked a lot older. She had it easy too. But I didn't want it like she had it. I didn't want to be her.

My Lowell bumped against the tree roots and jogged over the ruts and hustled me along. The road was dropping down the hill and narrowing into the lane, following the bayou. Dead Bayou had

been choked for a long time by matted hyacinths. I never did see any water in it. It looked under its flowers like the covered coffin I saw once in an old newspaper, an enormous long coffin lying there between the trees. Every summer and long into the fall, it was purple with flowers. That summer me and Dan got married, I used to pick big bunches of the hyacinths. But they died in no time and we stopped picking them. We never picked the black-eyed Susans that came later to the edges of the bayou. We soon found out we didn't have the time for flowers. The big coffin under the blanket of hyacinths stretched past my gate. Night was closing on it, sucking it in. I turned away and pushed on the gate. Dan never remembered to oil the hinges. I told myself I had to remind him again. I got tired reminding him about things. The iron pot I boiled my wash in swelled up, enormous, almost blocking the path to the house. We had put it in the shade of the sycamore tree, so I could work without the sun hitting me. I liked the pot. Dan said I was foolish, liking an old pot. But it used to belong to Mamma and stood in her yard. It reminded me of when I was a child. It made me think how rested and strong I felt when I was a child. A couple of days after Mamma died, me and Dan borrowed Turner's team and went over and fetched the pot and some of Mamma's other things. I didn't like Dan asking young Fred Turner for the team; but there was nothing else we could have done. I wanted the pot. I always remembered Mamma when I saw it and Bambine too, Bambine stirring the clothes with a wooden stick. When all of us children were small, Bambine used to come over on Mondays and help Mamma with the wash. Papa never minded Mamma getting help. He didn't expect us girls to wash heavy clothes no more than Mamma did. We had it easy. The boys had it hard, but not us girls. After I was married to Dan, I could see how easy I'd had it.

We helped Mamma in the house some and had to keep ourselves clean; and in the fall of the year we went to Turner's sugar mill after syrup. Sometimes old man Turner used to let us ride the mule that turned the crusher. I could ride the mule round and round longer than anybody else could. I could ride until old man Turner's nigger had to change the mule, because the mule got dizzy. Young Fred Turner used to watch me. Sometimes he laughed and called something to me. "You can't stand no more than a mule." Or something like that. I knew he was joking me. His words'd be all but

smothered by giggles. When I got off the mule, I wouldn't be able to stand up and him and me would laugh together. Sometimes he'd follow me home; but most often he wouldn't; he'd have business to do at the mill; to have heard him talk, anybody would have thought he was running the mill instead of his old man. He'd stand and watch me. I'd feel his eyes on me as I climbed the stile and turned up the road. I passed my hand over the back of my dress to see if my skirt was down all right. I knew I looked ugly with the heavy bucket dragging one side of me down. Old man Turner gave me a big bucket for a nickle. Bees used to follow me home. Sometimes they bumped against the hand that toted the bucket; but they didn't sting me. When I got home, Bambine maybe would be in the yard, washing, and maybe Shoolie would be hanging over the fence, staring at her. They wouldn't be talking. Shoolie'd be staring at her like he couldn't see her enough, or hadn't ever seen her before and didn't live with her day in and day out in the cabin up Snake Lane. She would keep stirring the clothes, her heavy lips hanging down, still, like lips cut out of wood, and her breasts moving the least bit as she moved the stick; her breasts weren't loose like Mamma's; they looked hard, but full and heavy. I didn't blame Shoolie for hanging round looking at her. A silky flag of steam rose and floated over her head. She didn't pay any mind to Shoolie or little Toog playing near her or the clothes foaming over the top of the pot; she stirred and stirred like she was wound up to stir. I got to the gate and Shoolie jumped off it and held it open and looked at me. Then he leaned close to me and blurted out, "Don't you tell your Mamma I is here," talking fast and holding his breath. "Don't you tell her nothing. You hear, Miss Florie? Please, Miss Florie." Mamma didn't like him hanging round, staring at Bambine like he was crazy. But I knew Shoolie didn't mean no harm. And he never kept Bambine from working. She raised her head and looked at me. Her hair stuck out. Her black face was shining with sweat, so was her neck; she looked polished all over like the fine piano the Turners had in their house. She stretched her flat nose. "Florie," talking, slow, in a deep voice, "give me a lick of your syrup." I held the bucket for her and she dug the handle of her stick into the syrup and lifted it out, dripping. Toog cried out and she leaned down and fed him. When she stood up again, her full height looked awful tall. She licked her hand and the stick.

It seemed to me now as I walked up the path round the fat pot that I could see Bambine standing up stirring, her heavy lips hanging, gleaming, painted with syrup. I could see Toog with his shift hardly covering his belly and Shoolie staring, green eyes clear as glass; I never saw a clear-eyed nigger until I saw Shoolie. I thought I could hear Mamma's chickens scuttling out of my path; she used to keep a lot of chickens; and the pigs raising themselves out of the mire and the old cow, Bottle, coming after me, nuzzling the bucket. Dan and me never had enough chickens to make a noise scuttling and we never bothered with pigs; we could buy pork at the store when we had money. And we could drive the cow out of the yard to live on the woods. We didn't milk her more than every other day in cotton-picking time. It was a good thing her feed was poor, I thought, or she'd have suffered not being milked. I knew I wasn't walking to Mamma's door, but my own. My baby came running to meet me. She was whimpering. I wiped her nose with my hand. **Toog was stuffing some sticks into the stove.**

"Toog," I fussed, "why you ain't started the fire before now? What you been doing? The baby's hongry. Why you didn't give her a cold sweet potato?"

Toog didn't answer. He went on shoving in the sticks. He never spoke much, like his mamma, and his lips hung down like hers. But his eyes were like Shoolie's, strange, light, not nigger eyes. The baby leaned against me, munching the potato. I took her in my arms.

"Toog," sitting down and talking to his back, "keep stirring the grits so it ain't going to be lumpy." I was too tired to move. "God, I wish I could learn you." The baby smelled hot. I held her close to me. She was awful hungry. I kept fussing at Toog, "Dish out the food. Make haste. I don't know how come you let the baby get so hongry." He piled the food on the plate and set it on the table and didn't talk back to me. He wasn't a sassy nigger. He was a lot like Shoolie. I coughed. "Dish out your supper, Toog," I said. "I reckon you're hongry enough to eat."

He took his plate to the shed room and sat down on the bench under the low roof. His back looked like a pencil line scratched on the darkness, awful thin. I kept watching the little thin line that was him. He helped me a lot and I always let my sharp temper lash out at him. But I knew Toog didn't mind as long as I kept him and fed him, and I was going to keep him as long as I kept myself, the

same as if he was my own. Darkness was covering the yard and reaching into the room where I sat. I couldn't see hardly anything but the sycamore tree raising its white trunk high into the darkness. The locusts were singing. Dan ought to've been coming home. I always had to worry about Dan. The baby nestled down in my lap. But I wanted her to eat some more. I wanted her to grow up fine. "Come on," I begged. "Eat some more. I want you to grow up fine. I don't want you picking cotton. I don't want you having it hard. You ain't going to neither, not if me and Dan can help it." I knew I was a fool sitting up talking to the baby and her sleeping. I went on talking like a fool, "God, I'm glad you're a girl." I sniffled and coughed and hugged her and she was sleeping and the darkness made me feel bad. It made me feel like I wanted to see my boys. They were the same as dead. Night was like death, I thought, foolish, as black and secret. Dan was hard on the boys. He was too hard. But I knew he didn't mean no harm to them. But he beat them awful. The boys ran away because they hated him. He beat them so awful. Oh God, thanks for making my baby a girl. Girls didn't get beat and girls didn't leave home. Bambine had left. But she was a nigger. Folks said she went clear to New Orleans. After that, Shoolie took to blowing his horn every day at sunset.

We children used to go down the lane to watch him. He'd step out of his cabin and turn right up the lane and puff his cheeks, blowing hard on the cow horn a good number of times; then he'd turn left and blow. I'd call to him when I couldn't stand to watch him no more, "Shoolie." And he'd lower the horn. He was always a polite nigger. "Bambine's in New Orleans," I'd say. "She ain't going to hear you no matter how hard you blow." He'd answer, stubborn, "She going to hear. Listen. Don't you hear that sound traveling away?" Nobody could tell that nigger nothing about blowing for Bambine. But he was a good nigger. I kept at him, "You oughtn't to wear yourself out blowing like that. Bambine's having a good time in New Orleans. Folks say that yellow nigger that took her has got some money." He panted, "Just let me tell her I'm waiting." Little Toog stood in back of his papa, watching. Shoolie went on, "She coming back. You going to see." Then he leaned forward and whispered, breathless, "You better be watching out for yourself, Miss Florie. Something tells me maybe I'm going to be blowing for you some day like I'm blowing for Bambine now."

You better be watching out some yellow man don't tote you off. He ain't no nigger, but he's yellow as some niggers. You better watch out, Miss Florie. You is too pretty for your own good." I laughed and pretended I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "Shoolie. Don't talk crazy." Everybody laughed because they all thought he wasn't all there. He didn't pay any mind to them. "I'm telling you for your own good," he whispered. "Mind out for yourself." I stopped laughing. His face looked awful sad; I couldn't laugh; and his eyes kept watching me as though his eyes were going to tell me things his mouth couldn't. I knew he liked me. Maybe because I never told Mamma when I caught him hanging on the fence behind Bambine.

I thought a lot about Shoolie, mostly at sunset time. He made me feel all choked up and bad. I hoped he knew I was keeping Toog. I could hear one of my scrawny hens that was too hungry to roost pecking round Toog's feet. Toog dropped her some sweet potato. Toog was always good to dumb beasts. I knew he was good to the baby too.

I called out, "Toog. Don't you give that old hen all your sweet potato."

Then I heard Dan in the yard. I knew it was him by the way his feet dragged. I got up and lit the lamp and put his food on to heat. His body made a black smear in the doorway. I looked at him. He looked strange, so black and heavy.

He came close to me and stooped over the baby. "What she's doing, asleep already?" he fussed. "Ain't she asleep early?" He put his hand over her face.

"Don't you wake her up," I cried. "She's all wore out and she just ate."

He kept looking at her and blurted all of a sudden, "They got a new schoolteacher over at Cotton Port. Old Babe Landry just told me. I bet this kid is going to be smart, smarter than the boys." He stopped and wet his lips. He sat down at the table, quick, and I put his food in front of him. I didn't know what had come over him because we never talked about the boys.

"Eat your supper," I said, trying to cover up his words. I sat facing him. "Did you get the wagon loaded?" I asked, natural.

"Sho'. It's loaded." And dropped his fork.

"Well, why you don't eat?" I asked.

"I been studying about Fred Turner's crop," he said, slow, like he was choosing his words. "He's got a nice crop on the land he works with the niggers, plenty nicer than ours. I reckon you know what that means."

"No," I said, biting my lip. "No. What it means?"

"Well, maybe he ain't going to let us go halves with him next year. He ain't the one to let us go halves if we don't make much. He's got to keep Miss Maime in morphine, don't he?" He kind of laughed.

"Don't start that talk," I cried. "For God sake. What we going to do if he don't let us go halves?"

"Don't ask me. How do I know?"

My lip hurt. "He'll let us go halves," I cried. "You see if he don't. It ain't so much work for him. We have all the worry," I hurried on, "and he gets half our crop no matter what."

"We ain't going to make eight bales this year," Dan said, pushing my words aside. "We ain't going to make five."

"This is a bad year for everybody," I reminded him. "We ain't had no rain in the growing time."

"Turner did good on the land he worked himself," he said again. "It held the wet good. He worked it a lot."

"Well, eat your supper," I said, tired. I knew there wasn't no use trying to tell Dan something. "It's seven o'clock right now," I went on. "We got to get to bed. We got to be up at three if you got the wagon loaded. It's loaded, ain't it, Dan?" keeping at him. "It's ready to drive to the gin? Ain't it? Ain't it?"

The baby moved and fussed.

"Stop yelling," Dan cried. "You're waking up the baby yourself."

"Hush, hush, dearie. She ain't awake," I whispered. "You got it loaded? Ain't you? It's loaded?" It wasn't that he was lazy. But I had to keep after him.

"I said it was," he growled. "I reckon you heard me."

"Well, make haste now," I said, "and come to bed."

I went to the next room and put the baby on the bed. I didn't wash her because she was sleeping.

I called out, "Dan. Come on to bed." I didn't want him sitting fretting.

For once, he got right up and came into the dark room. I could

make him out, standing near me, fiddling with his clothes. I began working with mine. My body felt heavy and big. Dan unbuttoned his clothes, slow. I could smell the sweat on him and me. I went to the shed and washed. But Dan was too tired.

I climbed into bed after him and pulled down the baby's nightgown. Dan touched her once and turned away from her and me. I could hear the locusts singing and singing. I couldn't sleep. It was hot in the bed. I smelled cotton.

Me and Dan left the baby sleeping on the bed.

Outside, everything was still. No wind moved the leaves. Only a white mist was moving, rising from the bayou. I could hear the horse thudding in the deep dust. Dan was leading him by a loose rein. I wasn't thinking a thing about Fred Turner. I was just walking along, and there he was. He was coming down the hill, a couple of niggers with him. The sight of him knocked out my breath. It always did, no matter how often I saw him. I wasn't scared of him exactly. I jist didn't like seeing him. I prayed God he wasn't going to stop us. He came, walking a little ahead of the niggers, big, his hip pocket bulging with the gun he always toted, his chest sticking out, tearing through the mist. Fred Turner was always like that, always seemed to be tackling something with all his strength. I couldn't catch my breath. He was just across the bayou from me, right close, looking at me. His eyes were two points. I waited like a fool instead of walking on.

He shouted at me, "You all sho' you got enough cotton to tote to the gin?" and laughed. "You all are some farmers," laughing.

His laughs prickled up my back like icy fingers. Me and Dan didn't say nothing. Fred Turner's eyes were gone; all of a sudden as if they had been rubbed out. I heard Dan and the old horse thudding on. I knew I had to move.

I could see our wagonload of cotton by the side of the road. It needed packing down. I got my shoes off, quick, and climbed on the load and stamped. I stamped, fierce. I wished I was stamping Turner. Then I felt like I was stamping him. My face burned. I was mashing him out of my life. I wasn't talking to him. I was just mashing him. He wasn't going to be a marker no more. I was paying him for what he did to Shoolie.

Dan called to me, "For God sakes, that's enough. What you reckon you packing down?"

I stopped and looked at Dan and jumped off the wagon. I watched it rumble into the darkness and get swallowed.

The milky mist was moving off over the fields, slow. It made them look sad and kind of scary. I walked on down the road through the stillness, stretching my legs wide. They were strong as a man's legs. My heart was big and strong too. I could feel it beating. I ought to have talked up to Turner, I thought, mad with myself. He wasn't no better than me and Dan. I ought to have talked right back to him. I stood still, hearing wagon chains rattling, knowing they were Turner's. I waited and saw him coming, riding above the mist. I made myself stand there and look straight at him. I had bold eyes and I made them hold Turner. They seemed to drag his wagon to a stop. He looked down at me. His eyes got under my clothes. Fred Turner's eyes always did that.

He laughed that laugh of his as if he wasn't having any fun. "Well, if it ain't Miss Florie again. Hello, Florie." His hard voice smashed the silence. I looked down at my feet. So did the nigger beside him look down. "You ain't lost your tongue, have you?" he yelled. "You can say good morning, I reckon, without dying from it."

I worked my tongue. But I didn't make a sound. I nodded, and that seemed to satisfy him. I was sweating. My body felt awful hot.

He took his eyes off me at last and looked over the field. "I might get that white nigger down the road named Lamson to go halves with me," he said and spit over the side of the wagon. "This is good land. I'm going to make a good crop off it. Now what you going to say to that? What you going to say?" he kept on. "You better speak up."

I coughed and swallowed. "There ain't been no rain," I panted. "You can't do nothing without rain."

"You can work the ground good," he threw back. "The fellow you married is too lazy." He never had no use for Dan. "You work the ground good," he went on, "and the crop'll be good. I ain't going to have no scraggly cotton with no bolls, throwing away the land. I ain't going to have it. Damn it."

I didn't move and neither did the nigger. Turner took his eyes off me and put them on the nigger and on me again. He was watching how dead quiet he made me and the nigger.

He raised his whip and touched me with it, squirming it over my shoulder, and I didn't flinch so much as an eyelash. "Yes ma'am," he whined, "you all better watch out. You might find yourselves chased off here and that nigger, Lamson, going halves." He watched me a long minute and I didn't move. One of his horses blew some air through its nose and that roused him and he gave the horse a lick with the whip. I knew he wanted to make the beast as quiet as he did us humans, me and the nigger. "Gid-dap," he cried, giving the horse another lick. The wagon rattled. The nigger jolted by me like a rag doll, so still and spineless.

I stood there. Oh God, I thought, I was a fool; I couldn't open my mouth to Turner. I was a fool believing I could mash him out of my life. He wasn't no dead marker neither. He was a cat with busy claws. He had caught me and Dan and the baby too. We were the mice. I couldn't do nothing. I wished Dan was the man to stand up to Turner. But I knew there wasn't no use wishing. Dan couldn't do nothing, no more than Shoolie could. I raised my heavy feet and moved. I was tired trying to do something against Fred Turner. I was tired thinking too. Poor Shoolie. His horn was still now.

Fred had been dead-set against his blowing. Everybody felt sorry for Shoolie; but not Fred Turner, he didn't feel sorry. He said Shoolie didn't have no right blowing and sending the sound out over the Turners' field. Fred always made it a point to make the nigger stop blowing. No matter where Fred was when he heard the horn, he would quit what he was doing and go off down Shoolie's lane and stop before Shoolie and holler and, if Shoolie didn't stop quick enough, he'd grab the nigger's arm. I saw him many a time. The nigger would turn his scared eyes to Fred and lower the horn. Fred'd laugh and spit. "The nigger's crazy," he'd say to me after he finished spitting. "I ain't going to have that horn blowing in my ears. He ain't going to make me crazy or deaf neither." And Shoolie looked at me. He never looked long at Fred. "I hate good-for-nothing niggers like Shoolie," Fred went on.

I walked, slow, lugging my heavy thoughts. The mist was gone. The hyacinths looked faded and old. The sky was red; it made a wall in front of me. The air was heavy. I couldn't hardly breathe. Miss Maime was sitting on the gallery. I watched her rocking and the sound she made rode across the bayou to me. She had a white

shawl round her head. She looked like a ghost. Her heels kept clicking, sharp, rocking and never stopping. Seemed like her heels were following me.

I half ran down the hill, thanking God I wasn't her. I kept thinking I wasn't her and thanking God for it and for Dan and my baby who was a girl. Dan wasn't quick and smart like Fred Turner was or nothing like that and I knew it. But I didn't care. I wouldn't have been Miss Maime married to Fred Turner for nothing on earth. I wiped my face.

I shoved open my gate, and my baby was sitting on the ground. I grabbed her, quick, and hugged her. She squirmed. She didn't like to be grabbed and hugged like that. I sat her down and laughed; but I didn't feel like laughing. Toog had a fire going on the bricks under the washpot. He was limping round the yard, hunting sticks. I watched him and all of a sudden I was wondering if he remembered me when I was a kid stopping in his daddy's cabin. If I went to the woods in back of the cabin to pick blackberries, I always stopped to see Shoolie. I'd always give Shoolie a big helping out of my bucket. I never asked Toog if he remembered something, and he never said.

Toog and me used to watch Shoolie stuff the berries down his throat. Shoolie'd laugh. "You all are having as much fun as if you all was eating," he'd say. Then he'd stand up and wipe his hands on his pants and say, "Me and Toog is much obliged for the berries. Since Bambine is gone, we ain't got no time for picking." He'd break off and open his eyes and go on in a changed voice, "I swear to God, Miss Florie, you sho' is pretty, too pretty for your own good. You is like Bambine, I always said it, too fine for your own self." I didn't laugh. I kept staring back at him. I knew he hated Fred. All the niggers hated Fred Turner. They were scared of him. I used to feel kind of proud of the way the niggers all hated Fred and were scared of him. I used to look at Fred's cold gray eyes and his heavy hands and his strong neck and the way it sat in the middle of his square shoulders and I used to think Fred Turner couldn't help being fine and strong and making folks scared of him. And he wasn't scared of nothing.

Me and Fred used to go walk at the end of the long summer days. Mamma and Papa never cared, because Fred was a Big Dog and I was doing good for myself getting Fred Turner. We always went ♡

to the Scary Woods. The path there was hidden and dark and me and Fred could press close together. The cypress trees and oaks and sycamores, reaching above us, looked like tall haunts. Fred would squeeze my arm and I'd feel his touch run through me. "You ain't scared?" he'd whisper. I giggled, "I am and I ain't." And wouldn't know if it was fear or love that made my skin creep. He twisted my arm close to him, and I didn't cry out; I didn't mind being hurt; I knew his strong love made him hurt me. I didn't want to leave the woods. I wanted to be hidden with Fred. We walked along, slow, squeezing each other and stopping sometimes and following the path that was like a hole through the trees and coming out at last into the open where the pale light of dusk was lying. "You wasn't scared?" Fred asked. His eyes made my face hot. "You don't have to be scared of nothing when you're with me," he went on, spitting the way he did when he said something he meant real hard. "I got a gun," he explained. "Look here. Nobody can't afford to go nowheres without a gun." I said, "Put it up. For goodness sake." And grinned. "I didn't know a gun was good for haunts." His rough voice pushed against my face. You knew the kind of man Fred was the minute he opened his mouth. "I don't give that for a man that don't tote a gun," snapping his fingers. I said again, "Put it up." Shoolie's horn swallowed my words. He was blowing it, hard. Fred's face got fiery and there was a white line round his mouth. He cried out, "There's that fool nigger. I'm going to make him stop that blowing if it's the last thing I do. He's got his nerve blowing like he owned the world." I was scared, I didn't know why, of something in Fred's red and white face. I argued, "He ain't hurting you. Why you don't let him alone?" He turned on me, yelling, "I don't like that blowing. I ain't never liked it. If you like a nigger making a racket, I don't. And I been telling Shoolie." He grabbed my wrist and started down Shoolie's lane. The blowing swelled out and sounded awful mournful. I tried to pull away, crying, "I don't want to go yonder. I ain't going." His voice was hard, strong, like iron. "Come on," he cried. "And look here," turning me to face him, "when we're married, you ain't going to be saying what you going to do and what you ain't." He gave me a funny look like he was seeing me for the first time. And pulled me on. His grip on my arm felt like an iron grip. The horn sound was opening like a funnel and we were walking into the middle of it. Shoolie was standing in the

lane with Toog near; little Toog was pouting and picking his nose. Fred yelled out, "Stop that blowing." Shoolie took the horn out of his mouth. The sound broke off like it was stepped on. Shoolie began begging, "I got to be blowing. Excuse me, Mr. Fred. It's time." Fred hollered, "You quit." But the nigger raised the horn and blew. Fred grabbed the nigger's arm and yelled, "You god-damn sassy nigger." Shoolie pulled away. I never knew what got into Shoolie that day. He yanked his arm away from Fred. He was little and thin; but he was strong. He was panting, "It ain't nothing to you, white man. I'm got to blow. Bambine might be waiting. I got to blow for her to come home." He blew, stubborn. Fred yelled, "Quit. Quit, you black son of a—" The blowing was going off over Fred's head when his shot smashed it. The awful loud shot knocked the horn out of Shoolie's mouth, broke against the trees. A thin ribbon of smoke moved away. Shoolie screamed. He was holding his stomach and screaming. Blood slid between his fingers. He looked at it. Then looked at Fred and babbled out, "You killed me. You killed me." He said it over and over. "You killed me. For nothing. I wasn't doing you nothing. I was blowing for Bambine. She was listening for me to blow. You killed me." He rocked and turned his eyes to me; they were clear as clear mirrors. "Miss Florie," he cried and toppled down, slow, and hit the ground and his eyes kept hold of me and didn't change as though they didn't feel the fall. "Miss Florie, you seen him," he went on, "you seen him. I didn't do him nothing. He did it for nothing. You seen him. You better go on away from him. You better go on," in a new strong voice, "go on. Run." He rolled a little like a log finding a place on a pile. His mouth was open. One big blood bubble ballooned between his fingers. I screamed and ran. My throat felt tight. Fred called me. I couldn't hardly breathe. He kept yelling. But he wasn't chasing me. I ran past my house. I knew Dan would be at the store, wishing I had let him come over home.

There was a lot of men on the store gallery. They were talking and yawning and chewing and spitting like always. I didn't hardly see them. I ran to Dan and threw my arms around his neck and hugged him and cried. Dan's arms covered me and I felt safe. But that day was a long time ago. I never felt that safe again.

I wiped my face, wishing Shoolie was back again. I stirred the clothes in the pot, slow, like I used to see Bambine stir them, wish-

ing the old days were back with Bambine in Mamma's yard and Shoolie hanging over the gate. I blew my nose on my apron and stirred and stirred. Steam kept blowing up from the pot and covering me. I stirred. I didn't stop when I heard Dan fumbling with the gate. He came on in the yard, touching the baby's head when he passed her.

I called to him, "Dan. How much'd the load make?"

"A bale," he said, "four hundred and eighty pounds."

"That ain't much."

"It ain't bad," he gave back, pulling off the horse's bridle.

"Well," I said, and stopped stirring. I could feel my heart hanging in me, heavy. "You saw Turner?"

"Sho'. He was yonder. Getting ginned." I waited. And Dan saw me wait. "He didn't say much," Dan said. "But we're going halves another year. He let that out." I didn't move. Dan watched me. "Well," he asked me, "ain't you satisfied?"

"Sho'," I said and stirred. The smell and the mist from the steaming clothes rose up between me and Dan. The gray mist was as good as walls around me. I was in the world alone; but only for a minute and Shoolie's horn was sounding and breaking down my walls. I never had heard his horn before in the broad daylight. The sound was close to me, covering me and moaning, moaning words about me and Dan. Me and Dan, we were mice in the same cat's paws, the paws that had killed Shoolie. We couldn't do nothing. Me and Dan kept staring at each other. And Shoolie was tired. The blowing faded. It spread out, thin, over the fields and dropped down into the hollow where the bayou was. I pulled my eyes away from Dan's and lowered my head and stirred; he moved across the yard; and I kept stirring.

JOLLY

Thomas Thompson

I BELIEVE that every man must secretly hold some precious illusion of his youth such as this of my own—of which his intelligence can scarcely boast—but which he continues, nevertheless, to hold aloft from the indignities and compromises of his dead loves, thinking that here is something that would have been—if it could have been . . . anyhow, whatever he is now, he was then, and she was: unwasted, fresh in deed and thought.

This precious illusion of mine has to do with Major Roland's family—his four daughters—and one in particular.

The afternoon I first saw her she was still in socks. It was at a dance that ladies of the Episcopal Church were giving in the parish house for the cadets. I was there because Aunt Kate wrote once a week, then twice a week, then to the commandant, demanding to know if I were attending my church and church functions. With our home broken up the way it was, she was afraid that Mother's wantonness would come out in me. To send me to church and keep me in touch with the "good things of life" was all that she knew to do about it.

Max, my roommate, like a number of others, was a victim of the same kind of orphanacy that I was. He had come along with his sardonic face to watch me sweat, but no sooner had we tucked ourselves away in a corner of the parish house than the two we were to know as Jolly and Nickie spied us and came sailing over. Nickie, incredible as it always seemed, was the mother of Jolly. No one ever thought of calling her Mrs. Roland.

"Boys that hide in corners are boys that want to be found," she piped at us, showing her little white teeth.

Even then Jolly was as tall as her mother; her blue eyes promised

to be ravishing. When we were introduced, she looked from Max to me and chose me.

"Write something in my memory book," she said, sitting down close beside me without embarrassment. She thumbed quickly through to a fresh page and leaned over to see what I would write.

I took the pencil and sneaked a guilty look at Max, and he was as dumbfounded as I. Nickie had him by the arm and was taking him out to the dance floor. When Max could not hide behind that sardonic grin, he could become horribly embarrassed.

Jolly was whispering with her warm breath in my ear: "I'll introduce you to Nancy if you'll dance the last one with me. Honest. This is the first cadet dance I've ever come to. It's your first, too, isn't it?"

I nodded stiffly to imply that the reason was not the same. Then as Nickie and Max danced off, she demanded aloud: "What are you going to write in my memory book?"

I wrote curtly, "Best of regards," and signed my initials. Her long-lashed eyes turned up to mine and I saw with a qualm how deeply blue they could be. But she was thirteen and I was almost sixteen.

"Oh, Paul," she said in a hurt voice, "is that all you're going to say?" But her face brightened. "Write a P. S.," she said. "I won't ever show it to anybody. Honest I won't."

"How'll you keep from it?" I asked. But I wrote, "P. S. You're a nice little girl." Her smile came slow, but she jumped to her feet, pulling me with her.

"All right," she said, "I promised. I'll introduce you to Nancy, but you've got the last one with me."

Nancy was dancing with the captain of my troop, but Jolly pushed between them with a daring that made me tremble.

"Sass," she said to him, "Mugs is looking for you. Come on. Nancy, this is Paul. Nickie likes him. So do I."

Nancy was quieter, more humorless, more reassuring, and I liked her. She was a wonderful dancer. Midge and Mugs were the other two. Jolly was the youngest. They were all their mother's daughters in lightness of figure, blackness of hair, and the lilting quality of voice. Nancy was the most beautiful and the most composed.

At five-thirty the last waltz came while I was dancing with

Nancy. Jolly claimed it. She was almost as good a dancer as Nancy. She snuggled closely into my arms and I would have enjoyed it if Max had not been watching me from his corner.

"I like the dress you're wearing," I told her, dancing to the other end of the hall.

"You told Nancy the same thing."

"She's wearing a nice dress, too."

"Well," she amended thoughtfully, "I don't care what you say to Nancy. I can't have dates myself until the final ball, but if you come over to see Nancy, I can talk to you. I already have a date for the ball next spring."

"Have you?"

"Yes, smarty. Peter Riley—a sergeant in Headquarters troop."

"Headquarters troop doesn't rate so well," I said superiorly, not realizing what I was letting myself in for.

"Well, he's a sergeant, anyway, but I'll break it if you'll take me."

"You can't go around breaking dates with *sergeants*."

She raised her shoulders. "Pooh," she said. Then she dropped her eyes with conquering demureness. "Well, really, he might not have been very serious when he asked me." Then she added defiantly, "But he will be when Aunt Simmy sends me my 'coming out' clothes. I'll be as pretty as any of them. Prettier than most. You're going to ask me, aren't you?"

"You're still in socks," I hedged brutally.

"You're not so old yourself. You won't be ashamed. Ask me or I'll cry right here!"

I was really afraid she might. "All right," I said, swallowing. "Go to the final ball with me."

Her face changed, and she said in the same arch tone that she would have used if I had stood there for five minutes begging: "I'd love to. About what time?"

The humor of the situation suddenly burst upon me like tinkling glass, and I laughed.

"About nine o'clock," I answered, straightening my face.

She giggled, and as the music stopped, she whispered in my ear, "I like you better than Peter Riley."

Max and I were early when we called the next Monday. The Major was just a mathematics instructor and he lived across town

in a district largely consigned to boarding houses, but his house, unpainted and barny as it must have been, represented to me and Max the kind of cheer and home decency for which we were starved.

Jolly met us at the door and Nickie came down the stairs hooking the side of her dress.

"Oh, Nickie," Jolly cried, "here's Paul and his friend that wouldn't dance with me. Paul, you came to see Nancy, didn't you?"

I nodded willingly, and Nickie took our caps and gloves.

"Awfully glad to see you both. Paul, what did you write in Jolly's book? She's trying to make us think you really said something very sentimental."

Jolly frowned.

"Nickie, that's a secret," she said.

"Pooh, child! No one has ever had a secret in this house. She just loves to act, Paul. Are you high church or low? We're the lowest of the high."

"So am I."

"Goody, we're the same thing!" said Jolly. "What are you, Max?"

"I don't go to church," snapped Max. "Neither would Paul if his aunt hadn't written the Wolf."

"Goodness, what a wry tongue," laughed Nickie, saving him the silent embarrassment of his own rudeness. He always started a visit that way, but before he had been there an hour, they had him purring like a cat before the fire.

Back in our barracks that night, Max said matter-of-factly: "This Nancy is a nice kid. Midge and Mugs are all right."

"I like the whole family," I agreed with too much enthusiasm. "Nickie knows how to make you feel at home."

"Trying to keep up with the girls," Max snorted.

"She does a pretty good job of it, too, and that Jolly is smart as a whip."

Max looked at me shrewdly.

"A pest," Max snorted. "She's just like my kid sister. Take my advice and steer clear of her."

I hated Max for that; yet I said nothing, for I privately dreaded and respected his judgment. The adolescent fear of being laughed at was strong within me.

At the Rolands' we continued to receive the unstinted welcome

that was not forthcoming in every home that we entered that year. Mothers in that staid little town had an uncanny faculty for sizing us up. Too much spending money, and the air of flippant arrogance that we sported, marked us for what we were and our parents for what they were. But there was none of this distrust among the Rolands. Accepted precautions were for reputations more easily soiled.

Jolly's age seemed to hamper her but little. On Monday afternoons she and her mother would sail from one group of cadets to another, occupying the idle, keeping up that gay cross fire of improbable chatter that never seemed to pause or stale under that roof. Strictly speaking, Max had been right about Nickie, and her gaiety might seem, as I look back now, a little pathetic, a little desperate; but whether it sprang of desperation or lightness of heart, she was gay with a courage, and her bubbling nonsense released the gnawing constraint of many a reticent youth.

In the regular manner, Nancy began by taking Max and me under her wing, later handing us down to Midge and Mugs. We practically camped at the Rolands' during the Christmas furlough. During that time I got to know a side of Jolly that I like to think none but me has ever seen. Max and Nickie and the girls would troop off to the movie; I would stay at home with Jolly and Nancy. Like as not Nancy would be called upstairs or out to the kitchen (she virtually ran the household) leaving Jolly to entertain me. In these stolen moments I went back and retrieved a delicious part of my childhood that my sterile, apartment-house life had denied me. Jolly always had some secret game for us to play. Such a game was "Mug Duddle." I think I should have died if Max had caught me. "Where is Mug Duddle today?" I was taught to ask. Jolly would frown and answer something like this: "Mug Duddle is in the cellar with the rats and the spiders."—"What is Mug Duddle doing in the cellar with the rats and the spiders?"—"Doing penance for his sins, doing penance for his sins."—"Of what sin is Mug Duddle guilty?"—"Mug Duddle has thrown dish water on a little girl's cat."—"Is that his only sin?"—"Sin enough, sin enough. He shall be punished."—"Just for throwing water on a girl's cat?"—"Throwing DISH water on a LITTLE girl's cat. Tonight he shall be punished. A ghost—a gray ghost with green whiskers shall come to punish him. He has a hard black heart, a hard black heart."—

"How shall Mug Duddle be punished?"—"He shall sup of spider broth, spider broth, and the ghost shall sit and watch him, watch him sup of spider broth—because he has a hard black heart . . . Here, Silly, give me your hand and I'll tell you whether you'll be baldheaded when you're forty." So on we would go, and I could have kicked myself for the cowardly way I watched the door.

Really, in their gay, teasing, big-family fashion, Jolly's family was a little hard on her. Her quick tongue and apparent callousness belied a deeply sensitive nature. And, as I recall, it was the Major and her mother that carried this teasing the farthest.

On holidays the Major reserved the early hours of the afternoon for his *History of Mathematics*, but at teatime, Nancy would button him into his worn serge blouse and he would come in to cut the gingerbread and talk about Pythagoras or Galileo. This pedagogical rite performed, he was ready for anything.

"Nickie, my deah," he said one afternoon in his neighing, pedantic drawl, "have you by chance noticed the attention with which our Jolly serves young Paxton? Actually, it has reached the point where the rest of us must shift for ourselves. It would seem only fair that we should warn young Paxton of her designs."

"Really, Arnold," responded Nickie, "I scarcely think he needs warning. Jolly makes it plain enough. Yesterday she told me in perfect confidence—"

"Nickie, I never told you anything in perfect confidence," Jolly cut in. "But I like Paul better than anyone here, and I'm proud of it. So there."

"There you are, Paxton," said the Major, putting down his cup. "There you are, my boy."

I saw Max's mouth twist, and I felt myself blushing furiously.

"And besides that," continued Jolly, "Paul has a date with me for the final ball, haven't you, Paul?"

They all smiled at me and I dared not raise my eyes to either Jolly or Max.

"Sure," I laughed, attempting to pass it off with a sick grin.

But Nickie saw, and she gave her light little laugh. "Yes, but you made him ask you, didn't she, Paul? Didn't she?"

Jolly looked at me pleadingly, but I was hardened by my own embarrassment. The moment that I hesitated left her stranded. Nickie sailed in triumphantly.

"Jolly, you did! You should be ashamed. Paul, I would be bound by no such bargain."

Suddenly Jolly's eyes filled, and she fled upstairs. I was shocked and angry with myself and Max. Even so, I did not immediately understand what I had done. I was that sure of myself. The next Monday I called again, confidently brandishing an expensive box of chocolates. Jolly looked at the peace offering; then with blank blue eyes she looked at me.

"I am too young for presents," she said, and turned to Max. "Midge is upstairs; I'll call her."

I was stunned. My insides turned cold, and when she returned with that blank stare, all heart for the visit departed, leaving nothing but a gnawing vacancy. She did not appear angry, but unbearably hurt—surfeited with hurt and disappointment.

For some time I persisted in my calls, hopeful of some change, but immediately upon entering the house my appearance seemed to brush all of the laughter from her voice and face. Yet I could say nothing; my feelings turned me cold and silenced my tongue, but with the other cadets' return from the holidays my unaccustomed silence passed unnoticed.

I blamed Max, and I soon found a pretext to quarrel with him.

"You're just sore because that little hellcat wouldn't take your candy," he sneered.

I slapped him savagely, leaving the white print of my hand over his mouth.

"All right, you fool," he said hoarsely, "you asked for it; come on."

We fought behind the mess hall. The officer of the day caught us and turned us in to the Wolf; we were both confined to the hill for two months with twenty extra drills. I was moved into quarters by myself.

So I began the enduring torture of the spring term alone. On sleepless nights I would sit after taps, with my pipe, feet propped in the window, listening to the night sounds. I was eating my spider broth.

It was such a Saturday night near the middle of May. I had returned across the area from the picture show, and I could hear the music from the dance in the Armory. As I knocked my pipe on the

sill, I was aware of footsteps on the stoop, and turned to find Max in the light of the door.

"Hello, Paxton," he said stiffly.

"Hello."

"Nickie is over at the Armory. She said she'd like to see you."

"I didn't get a permit," I answered.

"That's your own business, but if I were you I'd quit licking my sores and go."

I sat stubbornly for half an hour before I snatched my dress uniform from the wardrobe. I struggled into it, and dropped outside my back window. I strode heedlessly into the Armory. As soon as I saw Nickie, I tagged.

"What do you want with me," I said brusquely.

"Oh, my deah boy, where have you been?"

"I've been confined."

"Yes, I heard of that horrible fight you and Max had. How terrible, how silly. Have you boys made up? When are you coming back to see us? You have been on my conscience for months. Really! But I have so many broken hearts to mend. You have no idea how common they are. Are you coming to church tomorrow?"

"No."

"Yes, you are, and you'll sit in our pew and have dinner with us. Jolly got her dress from Aunt Simmy yesterday. She's really very exciting. You know, she still expects you to take her to the ball."

"No she doesn't."

"How rude you are! But she doesn't have a date yet. Ask her to forgive you for what you've done. Really ours is such a large family—"

I vowed that I would not go, but I was waiting on the steps when the Major drove up in his old car. My heart sank with dismay as I recognized Jolly. She was no longer a child. She wore a large hat and one of those ridiculously abbreviated dresses that were fashionable in the twenties, but she was grown now—beyond mistake. I shivered, barely mustering a faltering "hello." I could not catch her expression under the wide brim of her hat, and before she could answer, Nickie rushed us into the church and herded us into the pew. I sat up very stiffly in my corseted blouse, praying that Jolly would raise her eyes to me. But if she had, I would never have taken

the courage to write the note. With desperation I tore a fly leaf from my prayer book and scrawled: "Jolly, I've been eating spider broth for months. I like you. I hate myself."

Her hand hesitated. "God," I thought helplessly, "what if she tears it up?" She took the note and read it and sat staring ahead of her. When, finally, she took my pencil, she wrote quickly without stopping: "I have suffered, too. Nancy says people don't grow up until they've suffered. But let's don't hurt each other any more. I'm fourteen now. Do I act it? I thought you would never say anything. Write me another note."

As we kneeled for the prayer, she tilted her face up to me. The blankness was gone from her eyes.

The final ball swung past in the jumbled chatter of other people's talk, but the following day stands out clear and rare in my memory. Max left with the rest of the corps on the afternoon train, but I rented a car, and Jolly and I drove to the country for a picnic.

"Let's hike," said Jolly as soon as we got out.

With my arm about her waist and hers about my waist, we tramped through the woods, skirted a pond where we heard the voices of picnickers, and followed a rail fence that enclosed a field of sprouting corn. Soon we came to another pond. It was deserted. We sat on a little nondescript platform in front of the icehouse and dangled our feet over the water. The sun was low, and our shadows were twenty feet long. With an underhanded jerk of my wrist I sent a flat creek rock skipping across the velvet surface. It hit once, skipped and disappeared, sank into the shallow water.

"That's the way it will be when you're gone," said Jolly. Her eyes were limpid and thoughtful. "Are you coming back?"

"Sure. Where else? Father won't keep me at home in the way."

"No, you won't come back," she said. "I have a feeling. That's the way it is with us. People are always going away and never coming back to us. I wonder if we shall all grow up to be old maids."

"Fat chance. But what if I come back and you've forgotten me? Scares me to think of it. You can be mean."

"I had to be—a little, or you would never have paid any attention to me. But I won't be again. Don't let me." Suddenly a wistful look came into her eyes. "Oh, Paul, I'm sorry I put on grown-ups' clothes. I have to wear them the rest of my life. I couldn't stand it without you—Paul, you've never loved anybody else, have you?" *

"No. Have you?"

"Not really. I couldn't stand it if you had."

"Gosh, Jolly, people get lonesome when they start growing up. I guess that's what makes them fall in love."

And as I brought myself to pronounce the word, the world became very solitary. The trees had already shut out the failing sun, and we sat so still that we could hear the ticking of my watch. She laid her cheek close to mine, and I kissed her softly.

Before we stood to go, I had revised the whole meaning of life. We were a long time wandering back to the car.

So it was too bad that I never returned, or perhaps, knowing myself, it is good that my parents decided to have another whirl at it and bundled me off to California with them. I thought I would never mend when I learned that I could not go back; then later, I cursed myself because I did . . . soon after Jolly knew, we ceased writing. I had a Christmas card from her and that was the last. There was a space of years when I forgot, but of late, since my own childless marriage went by the board, I have wasted a lot of time idling among those memories and speculations.

The other day, I ran into a fellow, and I could have learned about Jolly, but somehow, faced with the thing, I hadn't the heart to know.

OLD MORTALITY

Katherine Anne Porter

PART ONE: 1885-1902

SHE WAS a spirited-looking young woman, with dark curly hair cropped and parted on the side, a short oval face with straight eyebrows, and a large curved mouth. A round white collar rose from the neck of her tightly buttoned black basque, and round white cuffs set off lazy hands with dimples in them, lying at ease in the folds of her flounced skirt which gathered around to a bustle. She sat thus, forever in the pose of being photographed, a motionless image in her dark walnut frame with silver oak leaves in the corner, her smiling gray eyes following one about the room. It was a reckless indifferent smile, rather disturbing to her nieces, Maria and Miranda. Quite often they wondered why every older person who looked at the picture said, "How lovely"; and why everyone who had known her thought her so beautiful and charming.

There was a kind of faded merriment in the background, with its vase of flowers and draped velvet curtains, the kind of vase and the kind of curtains no one would have any more. The clothes were not even romantic looking, but merely most terribly out of fashion, and the whole affair was associated, in the minds of the little girls, with dead things: the smell of grandmother's medicated cigarettes, her furniture that smelled of beeswax, and her old-fashioned perfume, Orange Flower. The woman in the picture had been Aunt Amy, but she was only a ghost in a frame, a sad pretty story from old times. She had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy, and she had died young.

Maria and Miranda, aged twelve and eight years, knew they were young, though they felt they had lived a long time. They had lived not only their own years; their memories, it seemed to them,

began years before they were born, in the lives of the grown-ups around them, old people above forty, most of them, who had a way of insisting that they too had been young once. It was hard to believe.

Their father was Aunt Amy's brother Harry. She had been his favorite sister. He sometimes glanced at the photograph and said, "It's not very good. Her hair and her smile were her chief beauties, and they aren't shown at all. She was much slimmer than that, too. There were never any fat women in the family, thank God."

When they heard their father say things like that, Maria and Miranda simply wondered, without criticism, what he meant. Their grandmother was thin as a match; the pictures of their mother, long since dead, proved her to have been a candlewick, almost. Dashing young ladies, who turned out to be, to Miranda's astonishment, merely more of grandmother's grandchildren, like herself, came visiting from school for the holidays, boasting of their eighteen-inch waists. But how did their father account for great-aunt Eliza, who quite squeezed herself through doors, and who, when seated, was one solid pyramidal monument from floor to neck? What about great-aunt Keziah, in Kentucky? Her husband, great-uncle John Jacob, had refused to allow her to ride his good horses after she had achieved two hundred and twenty pounds. "No," said great-uncle John Jacob, "my sentiments of chivalry are not dead in my bosom; but neither is my common sense, to say nothing of charity to our faithful dumb friends. And the greatest of these is charity." It was suggested to great-uncle John Jacob that charity should forbid him to wound great-aunt Keziah's female vanity by such a comment on her figure. "Female vanity will recover," said great-uncle John Jacob, callously, "but what about my horses' backs? And if she had the proper female vanity in the first place, she would never have got into such shape." Well, great-aunt Keziah was famous for her heft, and wasn't she in the family? But something seemed to happen to their father's memory when he thought of the girls he had known in the family of his youth, and he declared steadfastly they had all been, in every generation without exception, as slim as reeds and graceful as sylphs.

This loyalty of their father's in the face of evidence contrary to his ideal had its springs in family feeling, and a love of legend that he shared with the others. They loved to tell stories, romantic and

poetic, or comic with a romantic humor; they did not gild the outward circumstance, it was the feeling that mattered. Their hearts and imaginations were captivated by their past, a past in which worldly considerations had played a very minor role. Their stories were almost always love stories, against a bright blank heavenly blue sky.

Photographs, portraits by inept painters who meant earnestly to flatter, and the festival garments folded away in dried herbs and camphor were disappointing when the little girls tried to fit them to the living beings created in their minds by the breathing words of their elders. Grandmother, twice a year compelled in her blood by the change of seasons, would sit nearly all of one day beside old trunks and boxes in the lumber room, unfolding layers of garments and small keepsakes; she spread them out on sheets on the floor around her, crying over certain things, nearly always the same things, looking again at pictures in velvet cases, unwrapping locks of hair and dried flowers, crying gently and easily as if tears were the only pleasure she had left.

If Maria and Miranda were very quiet, and touched nothing until it was offered, they might sit by her at these times, or come and go. There was a tacit understanding that her grief was strictly her own, and must not be noticed or mentioned. The little girls examined the objects, one by one, and did not find them, in themselves, impressive. Such dowdy little wreaths and necklaces, some of them made of pearly shells; such moth-eaten bunches of pink ostrich feathers for the hair; such clumsy big breast pins and bracelets of gold and colored enamel; such silly-looking combs, standing up on tall teeth capped with seed pearls and French paste. Miranda, without knowing why, felt melancholy. It seemed such a pity that these faded things, these yellowed long gloves and misshapen satin slippers, these broad ribbons cracking where they were folded, should have been all those vanished girls had to decorate themselves with. And where were they now, those girls? And the boys in the odd-looking collars? The young men seemed even more unreal than the girls, with their high buttoned coats, their puffy neckties, their waxed mustaches, their waving thick hair combed carefully over their foreheads. Who could have taken them seriously, looking like that?

No, Maria and Miranda found it impossible to sympathize with those young persons, sitting rather stiffly before the camera, hopelessly out of fashion; but they were drawn and held by the mysterious love of the living, who remembered and cherished these dead. The visible remains were nothing; they were dust, perishable as the flesh; the features stamped on paper and metal were nothing, but their living memory enchanted the little girls. They listened, all ears and eager minds, picking here and there among the floating ends of narrative, patching together as well as they could fragments of tales that were like bits of poetry or music, indeed were associated with the poetry they had heard or read, with music, with the theater.

"Tell me again how Aunt Amy went away when she was married." "She ran into the gray cold and stepped into the carriage and turned and smiled with her face as pale as death, and called out, 'Good-by, good-by,' and refused her cloak, and said, 'Give me a glass of wine.' And none of us saw her alive again." "Why wouldn't she wear her cloak, Cousin Cora?" "Because she was not in love, my dear." Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate, that time will come and take my love away. "Was she really beautiful, Uncle Bill?" "As an angel, my child." There were golden-haired angels with long blue pleated skirts dancing around the throne of the Blessed Virgin. None of them resembled Aunt Amy in the least, nor the type of beauty they had been brought up to admire. There were points of beauty by which one was judged severely. First, a beauty must be tall; whatever color the eyes, the hair must be dark, the darker the better; the skin must be pale and smooth. Lightness and swiftness of movement was an important point. A beauty must be a good dancer, superb on horseback, with a serene manner, an amiable gaiety tempered with dignity at all hours. Beautiful teeth and hands, of course, and over and above all this, some mysterious crown of enchantment that attracted and held the heart. It was all very exciting, and discouraging.

Miranda persisted through her childhood in believing, in spite of her smallness, thinness, her little snubby nose saddled with freckles, her speckled gray eyes and habitual tantrums, that by some miracle she would grow into a tall, cream-colored brunette, like Cousin Isabel; she decided always to wear a trailing white satin gown. Maria, born sensible, had no such illusions. "We are going

to take after mama's family," she said. "It's no use, we are. We'll never be beautiful, we'll always have freckles. And *you*," she told Miranda, "haven't even a good disposition."

Miranda admitted both truth and justice in this unkindness, but still secretly believed that she would one day suddenly receive beauty, as by inheritance, riches laid suddenly in her hands through no deserts of her own. She believed for quite a while that she would one day be like Aunt Amy, not as she appeared in the photograph, but as she was remembered by those who had seen her.

When Cousin Isabel came out in her tight black riding habit, surrounded by young men, and mounted gracefully, drawing her horse up and around so that he pranced learnedly on one spot while the other riders sprang to their saddles in the same sedate flurry, Miranda's heart would close with such a keen dart of admiration, envy, vicarious pride it was almost painful; but there would always be an elder present to lay a cooling hand upon her emotions. "She rides almost as well as Amy, doesn't she? But Amy had the pure Spanish style, she could bring out paces in a horse no one else knew he had."

Young namesake Amy, on her way to a dance, would swish through the hall in ruffled white taffeta, glimmering like a moth in the lamplight, carrying her elbows pointed backward stiffly as wings, sliding along as if she were on rollers, in the fashionable walk of her day. She was considered the best dancer at any party, and Maria, sniffing the wave of perfume that followed Amy, would clasp her hands and say, "Oh, I can't *wait* to be grown up." But the elders would agree that the first Amy had been lighter, more smooth and delicate in her waltzing; young Amy would never equal her.

Cousin Molly Parrington, far past her youth, indeed she belonged to the generation before Aunt Amy, was a noted charmer. Men who had known her all her life still gathered about her; now that she was happily widowed for the second time there was no doubt that she would yet marry again. But Amy, said the elders, had the same high spirits and wit without boldness, and you really could not say that Molly had ever been discreet. She dyed her hair, and made jokes about it. She had a way of collecting the men around her in a corner, where she told them stories. She was an unnatural mother to her ugly daughter Eva, an old maid past forty while her mother was still the belle of the ball. "Born when I was fifteen, you remember," Molly would say shamelessly, looking an old beau

straight in the eye, both of them remembering that he had been best man at her first wedding when she was past twenty-one. "Everyone said I was like a little girl with her doll."

Eva, shy and chinless, straining her upper lip over two enormous teeth, would sit in corners watching her mother. She looked hungry, her eyes were strained and tired. She wore her mother's old clothes, made over, and taught Latin in a Female Seminary. She believed in votes for women, and had traveled about, making speeches. When her mother was not present, Eva bloomed out a little, danced prettily, smiled showing all her teeth, and was like a dry little plant set out in a gentle rain. Molly was merry about her ugly duckling. "It's lucky for me my daughter is an old maid. She's not so apt," said Molly naughtily, "to make a grandmother of me." Eva would blush as if she had been slapped.

Eva was a blot, no doubt about it, but the little girls felt she belonged to their everyday world of dull lessons to be learned, stiff shoes to be limbered up, scratchy flannels to be endured in cold weather, measles and disappointed expectations. Their Aunt Amy belonged to the world of poetry. The romance of Uncle Gabriel's long, unrewarded love for her, her early death, was such a story as one found in old books: unworldly books, but true, such as the *Vita Nuova*, the Sonnets of Shakespeare and the Wedding Song of Spenser, and poems by Edgar Allan Poe. "Her tantalized spirit now blandly reposes, Forgetting or never regretting its roses . . ." Their father read that to them, and said, "He was our greatest poet," and they knew that "our" meant he was Southern. Aunt Amy was real as the pictures in the old Holbein and Dürer books were real. The little girls lay flat on their stomachs and peered into a world of wonder, turning the shabby leaves that fell apart easily, not surprised at the sight of the Mother of God sitting on a hollow log nursing her Child; not doubting either Death or the Devil riding at the stirrups of the grim knight; not questioning the propriety of the stiffly dressed ladies of Sir Thomas More's household, seated in dignity on the floor, or seeming to be. They missed all the dog and pony shows, and lantern-slide entertainments, but their father took them to see *Hamlet*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Richard the Third*, and a long sad play with Mary, Queen of Scots, in it. Miranda thought the magnificent lady in black velvet was truly the Queen of Scots, and was pained to learn that the real Queen had

died long ago, and not at all on the night she, Miranda, had been present.

The little girls loved the theater, that world of personages taller than human beings, who swept upon the scene and invested it with their presences, their more than human voices, their gestures of gods and goddesses ruling a universe. But there was always a voice recalling other and greater occasions. Grandmother in her youth had heard Jenny Lind, and thought that Nellie Melba was much over-rated. Father had seen Bernhardt, and Madame Modjeska was no sort of rival. When Paderewski played for the first time in their city, cousins came from all over the state and went from the grandmother's house to hear him. The little girls were left out of this great occasion. They shared the excitement of the going away, and shared the beautiful moment of return, when cousins stood about in groups, with coffee cups and glasses in their hands, talking in low voices, awed and happy. The little girls, struck with the sense of a great event, hung about in their nightgowns and listened, until someone noticed and hustled them away from the sweet nimbus of all that glory. One old gentleman, however, had heard Rubinstein, frequently. He could not but feel that Rubinstein had reached the final height of musical interpretation, and, for him, Paderewski had been something of an anticlimax. The little girls heard him muttering on, holding up one hand patting the air as if he were calling for silence. The others looked at him, and listened, without any disturbance of their grave tender mood. They had never heard Rubinstein; they had, one hour since, heard Paderewski, and why should anyone need to recall the past? Miranda, dragged away, half understanding the old gentleman, hated him. She felt that she too had heard Paderewski.

There was, then, a life beyond a life in this world, as well as in the next; such episodes confirmed for the little girls the nobility of human feeling, the divinity of man's vision of the unseen, the importance of life and death, the depths of the human heart, the romantic value of tragedy. Cousin Eva, on a certain visit, trying to interest them in the study of Latin, told them the story of John Wilkes Booth, who, handsomely garbed in a long black cloak, had leaped to the stage after assassinating President Lincoln. "*Sic semper tyrannis*," he had shouted superbly, in spite of his broken leg. The little girls never doubted that it had happened in just that way, and the moral seemed to be that one should always have Latin,

or at least a good classical poetry quotation, to depend upon in great or desperate moments. Cousin Eva reminded them that no one, not even a good Southerner, could possibly approve of John Wilkes Booth's deed. It was murder, after all. They were to remember that. But Miranda, used to tragedy in books and in family legends—two great-uncles had committed suicide and a remote ancestress had gone mad for love—decided that, without the murder, there would have been no point to dressing up and leaping to the stage shouting in Latin. So how could she disapprove of the deed? It was a fine story. She knew a distantly related old gentleman who had been devoted to the art of Booth, had seen him in a great many plays, but not, alas, at his greatest moment. Miranda regretted this; it would have been so pleasant to have the assassination of Lincoln in the family.

Uncle Gabriel, who had loved Aunt Amy so desperately, still lived somewhere, though Miranda and Maria had never seen him. He had gone away, far away, after her death. He still owned race horses, and ran them at famous tracks all over the country, and Miranda believed there could not possibly be a more brilliant career. He had married again, quite soon, and had written to grandmother, asking her to accept his new wife as a daughter in place of Amy. Grandmother had written coldly, accepting, inviting them for a visit, but Uncle Gabriel had somehow never brought his bride home. Harry had visited them in New Orleans, and reported that the second wife was a very good-looking well-bred blond girl who would undoubtedly be a good wife for Gabriel. Still, Uncle Gabriel's heart was broken. Faithfully once a year he wrote a letter to someone of the family, sending money for a wreath for Amy's grave. He had written a poem for her gravestone, and had come home, leaving his second wife in Atlanta, to see that it was carved properly. He could never account for having written this poem; he had certainly never tried to write a single rhyme since leaving school. Yet one day when he had been thinking about Amy, the verse occurred to him, out of the air. Maria and Miranda had seen it, printed in gold on a mourning card. Uncle Gabriel had sent a great number of them to be handed around among the family.

*She lives again who suffered life,
Then suffered death, and now set free*

*A singing angel, she forgets
The griefs of old mortality.*

"Did she really sing?" Maria asked her father.

"Now what has that to do with it?" he asked. "It's a poem."

"I think it's very pretty," said Miranda, impressed. Uncle Gabriel was second cousin to her father and Aunt Amy. It brought poetry very near.

"Not so bad for tombstone poetry," said their father, "but it should be better."

Uncle Gabriel had waited five years to marry Aunt Amy. She had been ill, her chest was weak; she was engaged twice to other young men and broke her engagements for no reason; and she laughed at the advice of older and kinder-hearted persons who thought it very capricious of her not to return the devotion of such a handsome and romantic young man as Gabriel, her second cousin, too: it was not as if she would be marrying a stranger. Her coldness was said to have driven Gabriel to a wild life and even to drinking. His grandfather was wealthy and Gabriel was his favorite; they had quarreled over the race horses, and Gabriel had shouted, "By God, I must have *something*." As if he had not everything already: youth, health, good looks, the prospect of riches, and a devoted family circle. His grandfather pointed out to him that he was little better than an ingrate, and showed signs of being a wastrel as well. Gabriel said, "You had race horses, and made a good thing of them." "I never depended upon them for a livelihood, sir," said his grandfather.

Gabriel wrote letters about this and many other things to Amy from Saratoga and from Kentucky and from New Orleans, sending her presents, and flowers packed in ice, and telegrams. The presents were amusing, such as a huge cage full of small green lovebirds, or, as an ornament for her hair, a full-petaled enameled rose with paste dewdrops, an enameled butterfly in brilliant colors suspended quivering on a gold wire above it; but the telegrams always frightened her mother, and the flowers, after a journey by train and then by stage into the country, were much the worse for wear. He would send roses when the rose garden at home was in full bloom. Amy could not help smiling over it, though her mother insisted it was touching and sweet of Gabriel. It must prove to Amy that she was always in his thoughts. ♥

"That's no place for me," said Amy, but she had a way of speaking, a tone of voice, which made it impossible to discover what she meant by what she said. It was possible always that she might be serious. And she would not answer questions.

"Amy's wedding dress," said the grandmother, unfurling an immense cloak of dove-colored cut velvet, spreading beside it a silvery-gray watered-silk frock, and a small gray velvet toque with a dark red breast of feathers. Cousin Isabel, the beauty, sat with her. They talked to each other, and Miranda could listen if she chose.

"She would not wear white, nor a veil," said grandmother. "I couldn't oppose her, for I had said my daughters should each have exactly the wedding dress they wanted. But Amy surprised me. 'Now what would I look like in white satin?' she asked. It's true she was pale, but she would have been angelic in it, and all of us told her so. 'I shall wear mourning if I like,' she said, 'it is *my* funeral, you know.' I reminded her that Lou and your mother had worn white with veils and it would please me to have my daughters all alike in that. Amy said, 'Lou and Isabel are not like me,' but I could not persuade her to explain what she meant. One day when she was ill she said, 'Mammy, I'm not long for this world,' but not as if she meant it. I told her, 'You might live as long as anyone, if only you will be sensible.' 'That's the whole trouble,' said Amy. 'I feel sorry for Gabriel,' she told me, 'he doesn't know what he's asking for.'

"I tried to tell her once more," said the grandmother, "that marriage and children would cure her of everything. 'All women of our family are delicate when they are young,' I said. 'Why, when I was your age no one expected me to live a year. It was called green-sickness, and everybody knew there was only one cure.' 'If I live for a hundred years and turn green as grass,' said Amy, 'I still shan't want to marry Gabriel.' So I told her very seriously that if she truly felt that way she must never do it, and Gabriel must be told once for all, and sent away. He would get over it. 'I have told him, and I have sent him away,' said Amy. 'He just doesn't listen.' We both laughed at that, and I told her young girls found a hundred ways to deny they wished to be married, and a thousand more to test their power over men, but that she had more than enough of that, and now it was time for her to be entirely sincere and make her decision. As for me," said the grandmother, "I wished with all my

heart to marry your grandfather, and if he had not asked me, I should have asked him most certainly. Amy insisted that she could not imagine wanting to marry anybody. She would be, she said, a nice old maid like Eva Parrington. For even then it was pretty plain that Eva was an old maid, born. Harry said, 'Oh, Eva—Eva has no chin, that's her trouble. If you had no chin, Amy, you'd be in the same fix as Eva, no doubt.' Your Uncle Bill would say, 'When women haven't anything else, they'll take a vote for consolation. A pretty thin bedfellow,' said your Uncle Bill. 'What I really need is a good dancing partner to guide me through life,' said Amy, 'that's the match I'm looking for.' It was no good trying to talk to her."

Her brothers remembered her tenderly as a sensible girl. After listening to their comments on her character and ways, Maria decided that they considered her sensible because she had asked their advice about her appearance when she was going out to dance. If they found fault in any way, she would change her dress or her hair until they were pleased, and say, "You are an angel not to let your poor sister go out looking like a freak." But she would not listen to her father, nor to Gabriel. If Gabriel praised the frock she was wearing, she was apt to disappear and come back in another. He loved her long black hair, and once, lifting it up from her pillow when she was ill, said, "I love your hair, Amy, the most beautiful hair in the world." When he returned on his next visit, he found her with her hair cropped and curled close to her head. He was horrified, as if she had willfully mutilated herself. She would not let it grow again, not even to please her brothers. The photograph hanging on the wall was one she had made at that time to send to Gabriel, who sent it back without a word. This pleased her, and she framed the photograph. There was a thin inky scrawl low in one corner, "To dear brother Harry, who likes my hair cut."

This was a mischievous reference to a very grave scandal. The little girls used to look at their father, and wonder what would have happened if he had really hit the young man he shot at. The young man was believed to have kissed Aunt Amy, when she was not in the least engaged to him. Uncle Gabriel was supposed to have had a duel with the young man, but father had got there first.

He was a pleasant, everyday sort of father, who held his daughters on his knee if they were prettily dressed and well behaved, and pushed them away if they had not freshly combed hair and nicely

scrubbed fingernails. "Go away, you're disgusting," he would say, in a matter-of-fact voice. He noticed if their stocking seams were crooked. He caused them to brush their teeth with a revolting mixture of prepared chalk, powdered charcoal, and salt. When they behaved stupidly he could not endure the sight of them. They understood dimly that all this was for their own future good; and when they were snively with colds, he prescribed delicious hot toddy for them, and saw that it was given them. He was always hoping they might not grow up to be so silly as they seemed to him at any given moment, and he had a disconcerting way of inquiring, "*How do you know?*" when they forgot and made dogmatic statements in his presence. It always came out embarrassingly that they did not know at all, but were repeating something they had heard. This made conversation with him difficult, for he laid traps and they fell into them, but it became important to them that their father should not believe them to be fools.

Well, this very father had gone to Mexico once and stayed there for nearly a year, because he had shot at a man with whom Aunt Amy had flirted at a dance. It had been very wrong of him, because he should have challenged the man to a duel, as Uncle Gabriel had done. Instead, he just took a shot at him, and this was the lowest sort of manners. It had caused great disturbance in the whole community and had almost broken up the affair between Aunt Amy and Uncle Gabriel for good. Uncle Gabriel insisted that the young man had kissed Aunt Amy, and Aunt Amy insisted that the young man had merely paid her a compliment on her hair.

During the Mardi Gras holidays there was to be a big gay fancy-dress ball. Harry was going as a bullfighter because his sweetheart, Mariana, had a new black lace mantilla and high comb from Mexico. Maria and Miranda had seen a photograph of their mother in this dress, her lovely eyes without a trace of coquetry looking gravely out from under a tremendous fall of lace from the peak of the comb, a rose tucked firmly over her ear. Amy copied her costume from a small Dresden-china shepherdess which stood on the mantel piece in the parlor; a careful copy with ribboned hat, gilded crook, very low-laced bodice, short basket skirts, green slippers and all. She wore it with a black half mask, but it was no disguise. "You would have known it was Amy at any distance," said father. Gabriel, six feet three in height as he was, had got himself up to match, and a

spectacle he provided in pale blue satin knee breeches and a blond curled wig with a hair ribbon. "He felt a fool, and he looked like one," said Uncle Bill, "and he behaved like one before the evening was over."

Everything went beautifully until the party gathered downstairs to leave for the ball. Amy's father—he must have been born a grandfather, thought Miranda—gave one glance at his daughter, her white ankles shining, bosom deeply exposed, two round spots of paint on her cheeks, and fell into a frenzy of outraged propriety. "It's disgraceful," he pronounced, sternly. "No daughter of mine is going to show herself in such a rig-out. It's bawdy," he thundered. "Bawdy!"

Amy had taken off her mask to smile at him. "Why, papa," she said very sweetly, "what's wrong with it? Look on the mantel piece. She's been there all along, and you were never shocked before."

"There's all the difference in the world," said her father, "all the difference, young lady, and you know it. You go upstairs this minute and pin up that waist in front and let down those skirts to a decent length before you leave this house. *And wash your face!*"

"I see nothing wrong with it," said Amy's mother, firmly, "and you shouldn't use such language before innocent young girls." She and Amy sat down with several females of the household to help, and they made short work of the business. In ten minutes, Amy returned, face clean, bodice filled in with lace, shepherdess skirt modestly sweeping the carpet behind her.

When Amy appeared from the dressing room for her first dance with Gabriel, the lace was gone from her bodice, her skirts were tucked up more daringly than before, and the spots on her cheeks were like pomegranates. "Now Gabriel, tell me truly, wouldn't it have been a pity to spoil my costume?" Gabriel, delighted that she had asked his opinion, declared it was perfect. They agreed with kindly tolerance that old people were often tiresome, but one need not upset them by open disobedience: their youth was gone, what had they to live for?

Harry, dancing with Mariana, who swung a heavy train around her expertly at every turn of the waltz, began to be uneasy about his sister Amy. She was entirely too popular. He saw young men make beelines across the floor, eyes fixed on those white silk ankles. Some of the young men he did not know at all, others he knew too well

and could not approve of for his sister Amy. Gabriel, unhappy in his lyric satin and wig, stood about holding his ribboned crook as though it had sprouted thorns. He hardly danced at all with Amy, he did not enjoy dancing with anyone else, and he was having a thoroughly wretched time of it.

There appeared late, alone, got up as Jean Lafitte, a young Creole gentleman who had, two years before, been for a time engaged to Amy. He came straight to her, with the manner of a happy lover, and said, clearly enough for everyone nearby to hear him, "I only came because I knew you were to be here. I only want to dance with you and I shall go again." Amy, with a face of delight, cried out "Raymond!" as if to a lover. She had danced with him four times, and had then disappeared from the floor on his arm.

Harry and Mariana, in conventional disguise of romance, irreproachably betrothed, safe in their happiness, were waltzing slowly to their favorite song, the melancholy farewell of the Moorish King on leaving Granada. They sang in whispers to each other, in their uncertain Spanish, a song of love and parting and that sword's point of grief that makes the heart tender towards all other lost and disinherited creatures: Oh, mansion of love, my earthly paradise . . . that I shall see no more . . . whither flies the poor swallow, weary and homeless, seeking for shelter where no shelter is? I too am far from home without the power to fly . . . Come to my heart, sweet bird, beloved pilgrim, build your nest near my bed, let me listen to your song, and weep for my lost land of joy . . .

Into this bliss broke Gabriel. He had thrown away his shepherd's crook and he was carrying his wig. He wanted to speak to Harry at once, and before Mariana knew what was happening she was sitting beside her mother and the two excited young men were gone. Waiting, disturbed and displeased, she smiled at Amy who waltzed past with a young man in Devil costume, including ill-fitting scarlet cloven hoofs. Almost at once, Harry and Gabriel came back, with serious faces, and Harry darted on the dance floor, returning with Amy. The girls and the chaperones were asked to come at once, they must be taken home. It was all mysterious and sudden, and Harry said to Mariana, "I will tell you what is happening, but not now . . ."

The grandmother remembered of this disgraceful affair only that Gabriel brought Amy home alone and that Harry came in somewhat

later. The other members of the party straggled in at various hours, and the story came out piecemeal. Amy was silent and, her mother discovered later, burning with fever. "I saw at once that something was very wrong. 'What has happened, Amy?' 'Oh, Harry goes about shooting at people at a party,' she said, sitting down as if she were exhausted. 'It was on your account, Amy,' said Gabriel. 'Oh, no, it was not,' said Amy, 'don't believe him, mammy.' So I said, 'Now enough of this. Tell me what happened, Amy.' And Amy said, 'Mammy, this is it. Raymond came in, and you know I like Raymond, and he is a good dancer. So we danced together, too much maybe. We went on the gallery for a breath of air, and stood there. He said, 'How well your hair looks. I like this new shingled style.' ' She glanced at Gabriel. 'And then another young man came out and said, 'I've been looking everywhere. This is our dance, isn't it?' And I went in to dance. And now it seems that Gabriel went out at once and challenged Raymond to a duel about something or other, but Harry doesn't wait for that. Raymond had already gone out to have his horse brought, I suppose one doesn't duel in fancy dress,' she said, looking at Gabriel, who fairly shrunk in his blue satin shepherd's costume, 'and Harry simply went out and shot at him. I don't think that was fair,' said Amy."

The grandmother agreed that indeed it was not fair; it was not even decent, and she could not imagine what her son Harry thought he was doing. "It isn't much of a way to defend your sister's honor," she said to him afterward. "I didn't want Gabriel to go fighting duels," said Harry, "that wouldn't have helped much, either."

Gabriel had stood before Amy, leaning over, asking once more the question he had apparently been asking her all the way home. "Did he kiss you, Amy?"

Amy took off her shepherdess hat and pushed her hair back. "Maybe he did," she answered, "and maybe I wished him to."

"Amy, you must not say such things," said her mother. "Answer Gabriel's question."

"He hasn't the right to ask it," said Amy, but without anger.

"Do you love him, Amy?" asked Gabriel, the sweat standing out on his forehead.

"It doesn't matter," answered Amy, leaning back in her chair.

"Oh, it does matter, it matters terribly," said Gabriel. "You must answer me now." He took both of her hands and tried to hold

them. Without moving she drew her hands away firmly and steadily so that he had to let go.

"Let her alone, Gabriel," said Amy's mother. "You'd better go now. We are all tired. Let's talk about it tomorrow."

She helped Amy to undress, noticing the changed bodice and the shortened skirt. "You shouldn't have done that, Amy. That was not wise of you. It was better the other way."

Amy said, "Mammy, I'm sick of this world. I don't like anything in it. It's so *dull*," she said, and for a moment she looked as if she might weep. She had never been tearful, even as a child, and her mother was alarmed. It was then she discovered that Amy had fever.

"Gabriel is dull, mother—he sulks," she said. "I could see him sulking every time I passed. It spoils things," she said. "Oh, I want to go to sleep."

Her mother sat looking at her and wondering how it had happened she had brought such a beautiful child into the world. "Her face," said her mother, "was angelic in sleep."

Some time during that fevered night, the projected duel between Gabriel and Raymond was halted by the offices of friends on both sides. There remained the open question of Harry's impulsive shot, which was not so easily settled. Raymond seemed vindictive about that, it was possible he might choose to make trouble. Harry, taking the advice of Gabriel, his brothers, and friends, decided that the best way to avoid further scandal was for him to disappear for a while. This being decided upon, the young men returned about day-break, saddled Harry's best horse and helped him pack a few things; accompanied by Gabriel and Bill, Harry set out for the Mexican border, feeling rather gay and adventurous.

Amy, being wakened by the stirring in the house, found out the plan. Five minutes after they were gone, she came down in her riding dress, had her own horse saddled, and struck out after them. She rode almost every morning; before her parents had time to be uneasy over her prolonged absence, they found her note.

What had threatened to be a tragedy became a rowdy lark. Amy rode to the border, kissed her brother Harry good-by, and rode back again with Bill and Gabriel. It was a three days' journey, and when they arrived Amy had to be lifted from the saddle. She was really ill by now, but in the gayest of humors. Her mother and father had been prepared to be severe with her, but, at sight of her, their feel-

ings changed. They turned on Bill and Gabriel. "Why did you let her do this?" they asked.

"You know we could not stop her," said Gabriel helplessly, "and she did enjoy herself so much!"

Amy laughed. "Mammy, it was splendid, the most delightful trip I ever had. And if I am to be the heroine of this novel, why shouldn't I make the most of it?"

The scandal, Maria and Miranda gathered, had been pretty terrible. Amy simply took to bed and stayed there, and Harry had skipped out blithely to wait until the little affair blew over. The rest of the family had to receive visitors, write letters, go to church, return calls, and bear the whole brunt, as they expressed it. They sat in the twilight of scandal in their little world, holding themselves very rigidly, in a shared tension as if all their nerves began at a common center. This center had received a blow, and family nerves shuddered, even into the farthest reaches of Kentucky. From whence in due time great-great-aunt Sally Rhea addressed a letter to *Mifs Amy Rhea*. In deep brown ink like dried blood, in a spidery hand adept at archaic symbols and abbreviations, great-great-aunt Sally informed Amy that she was fairly convinced that this calamity was only the forerunner of a series shortly to be visited by the Almighty God upon a race already condemned through its own wickedness, a warning that man's time was short, and that they must all prepare for the end of the world. For herself, she had long expected it, she was entirely resigned to the prospect of meeting her Maker; and Amy, no less than her wicked brother Harry, must likewise place herself in God's hands and prepare for the worst. "*Oh, my dear unfortunate young relative,*" exhorted great-great-aunt Sally, "*we must in our Extremtly join hands and appr before ye Dread Throne of Jdgmnt a United Fmly, if One is Mssg from ye Flock, what will Jesus say?*"

Great-great-aunt Sally's religious career had become comic legend. She had forsaken her Catholic rearing for a young man whose family were Cumberland^y Presbyterians. Unable to accept their opinions, however, she was converted to the Hard-Shell Baptists, a sect as loathsome to her husband's family as the Catholic could possibly be. She had spent a life of vicious self-indulgent martyrdom to her faith; as Harry commented: "Religion put claws on Aunt

Sally and gave her a post to whet them on." She had outargued, out-fought, and outlived her entire generation, but she did not miss them. She bedeviled the second generation without ceasing, and was beginning hungrily on the third.

Amy, reading this letter, broke into her gay full laugh that always caused everyone around her to laugh too, even before they knew why, and her small green lovebirds in their cage turned and eyed her solemnly. "Imagine drawing a pew in heaven beside Aunt Sally," she said. "What a prospect."

"Don't laugh too soon," said her father. "Heaven was made to order for Aunt Sally. She'll be on her own territory there."

"For my sins," said Amy, "I must go to heaven with Aunt Sally."

During the uncomfortable time of Harry's absence, Amy went on refusing to marry Gabriel. Her mother could hear their voices going on in their endless colloquy, during many long days. One afternoon Gabriel came out, looking very sober and discouraged. He stood looking down at Amy's mother as she sat sewing, and said, "I think it is all over, I believe now that Amy will never have me." The grandmother always said afterward, "Never have I pitied anyone as I did poor Gabriel at that moment. But I told him, very firmly, 'Let her alone, then, she is ill.' " So Gabriel left, and Amy had no word from him for more than a month.

The day after Gabriel was gone, Amy rose looking extremely well, went hunting with her brothers Bill and Stephen, bought a velvet wrap, had her hair shingled and curled again, and wrote long letters to Harry, who was having a most enjoyable exile in Mexico City.

After dancing all night three times in one week, she woke one morning in a hemorrhage. She seemed frightened and asked for the doctor, promising to do whatever he advised. She was quiet for a few days, reading. She asked for Gabriel. No one knew where he was. "You should write him a letter; his mother will send it on." "Oh, no," she said. "I miss him coming in with his sour face. Letters are no good."

Gabriel did come in, only a few days later, with a very sour face and unpleasant news. His grandfather had died, after a day's illness. On his deathbed, in the name of God, being of a sound and disposing mind, he had cut off his favorite grandchild Gabriel with

one dollar. "In the name of God, Amy," said Gabriel, "the old devil has ruined me in one sentence."

It was the conduct of his immediate family in the matter that had embittered him, he said. They could hardly conceal their satisfaction. They had known and envied his quite just, well-founded expectations. Not one of them offered to make any private settlement. No one even thought of repairing this last-minute act of senile vengeance. Privately they blessed their luck. "I have been cut off with a dollar," said Gabriel, "and they are all glad of it. I think they feel somehow that this justifies every criticism they ever made against me. They were right about me all along. I am a worthless poor relation," said Gabriel. "My God, I wish you could see them."

Amy said, "I wonder how you will ever support a wife, now."

Gabriel said, "Oh, it isn't so bad as that. If you would, Amy—"

Amy said, "Gabriel, if we get married now there'll be just time to be in New Orleans for Mardi Gras. If we wait until after Lent, it may be too late."

"Why, Amy," said Gabriel, "how could it ever be too late?"

"You might change your mind," said Amy. "You know how fickle you are."

There were two letters in the grandmother's many packets of letters that Maria and Miranda read after they were grown. One of them was from Amy. It was dated ten days after her marriage.

"Dear Mammy, New Orleans hasn't changed as much as I have since we saw each other last. I am now a staid old married woman, and Gabriel is very devoted and kind. Footlights won a race for us yesterday, she was the favorite, and it was wonderful. I go to the races every day, and our horses are doing splendidly; I had my choice of Erin Go Bragh or Miss Lucy, and I chose Miss Lucy. She is mine now, she runs like a streak. Gabriel says I made a mistake, Erin Go Bragh will stay better. I think Miss Lucy will stay my time.

"We are having a lovely visit. I'm going to put on a domino and take to the streets with Gabriel sometime during Mardi Gras. I'm tired of watching the show from a balcony. Gabriel says it isn't safe. He says he'll take me if I insist, but I doubt it. Mammy, he's very

nice. Don't worry about me. I have a beautiful black-and-rose-colored velvet gown for the Proteus Ball. Madame my new mother-in-law wanted to know if it wasn't a little dashing. I told her I hoped so or I had been cheated. It is fitted perfectly smooth in the bodice, very low in the shoulders—Papa would not approve—and the skirt is looped with wide silver ribbons between the waist and knees in front, and then it surges around and is looped enormously in the back, with a train just one yard long. I now have an eighteen-inch waist, thanks to Madame Duré. I expect to be so dashing that my mother-in-law will have an attack. She has them quite often. Gabriel sends love. Please take good care of Graylie and Fiddler. I want to ride them again when I come home. We're going to Saratoga, I don't know just when. Give everybody my dear dear love. It rains all the time here, of course . . .

"P.S. Mammy, as soon as I get a minute to myself, I'm going to be terribly homesick. Good-bye, my darling Mammy."

The other was from Amy's nurse, dated six weeks after Amy's marriage.

"I cut off the lock of hair because I was sure you would like to have it. And I do not want you to think I was careless, leaving her medicine where she could get it, the doctor has written and explained. It would not have done her any harm except that her heart was weak. She did not know how much she was taking, often she said to me, one more of those little capsules wouldn't do any harm, and so I told her to be careful and not take anything except what I gave her. She begged me for them sometimes but I would not give her more than the doctor said. I slept during the night because she did not seem to be so sick as all that and the doctor did not order me to sit up with her. Please accept my regrets for your great loss and please do not think that anybody was careless with your dear daughter. She suffered a great deal and now she is at rest. She could not get well but she might have lived longer. Yours respectfully . . ."

The letters and all the strange keepsakes were packed away and forgotten for a great many years. They seemed to have no place in the world.

PART TWO: 1904

During vacation on their grandmother's farm, Maria and Miranda, who read as naturally and constantly as ponies crop grass, and with much the same kind of pleasure, had by happy chance laid hold of some forbidden reading matter, brought in and left there with missionary intent, no doubt, by a Protestant cousin. It fell into the right hands if enjoyment had been its end. The reading matter was printed in poor type on spongy paper, and was ornamented with smudgy illustrations all the more exciting to the little girls because they could not make head or tail of them. The stories were about beautiful but unlucky maidens, who for mysterious reasons had been trapped by nuns and priests in dire collusion; they were then "immured" in convents, where they were forced to take the veil—an appalling rite during which the victims shrieked dreadfully—and condemned forever after to most uncomfortable and disorderly existences. They seemed to divide their time between lying chained in dark cells and assisting other nuns to bury throttled infants under stones in moldering rat-infested dungeons.

Immured! It was the word Maria and Miranda had been needing all along to describe their condition at the Convent of the Child Jesus, in New Orleans, where they spent the long winters trying to avoid an education. There were no dungeons at the Child Jesus, and this was only one of numerous marked differences between convent life as Maria and Miranda knew it and the thrilling paper-backed version. It was no good at all trying to fit the stories to life, and they did not even try. They had long since learned to draw the lines between life, which was real and earnest, and the grave was not its goal; poetry, which was true but not real; and stories, or forbidden reading matter, in which things happened as nowhere else, with the most sublime irrelevance and unlikelihood, and one need not turn a hair, because there was not a word of truth in them.

It was true the little girls were hedged and confined, but in a large garden with trees and a grotto; they were locked at night into a long cold dormitory, with all the windows open, and a sister sleeping at either end. Their beds were curtained with muslin, and small night lamps were so arranged that the sisters could see through the

curtains, but the children could not see the sisters. Miranda wondered if they ever slept, or did they sit there all night quietly watching the sleepers through the muslin? She tried to work up a little sinister thrill about this, but she found it impossible to care much what either of the sisters did. They were very dull good-natured women who managed to make the whole dormitory seem dull. All days and all things in the Convent of the Child Jesus were dull, in fact, and Maria and Miranda lived for Saturdays.

No one had even hinted that they should become nuns. On the contrary Miranda felt that the discouraging attitude of Sister Claude and Sister Austin and Sister Ursula towards her expressed ambition to be a nun barely veiled a deeply critical knowledge of her spiritual deficiencies. Still Maria and Miranda had got a fine new word out of their summer reading, and they referred to themselves as "immured." It gave a romantic glint to what was otherwise a very unexciting life for them, except for blessed Saturday afternoons during the racing season.

If the nuns were able to assure the family that the deportment and scholastic achievements of Maria and Miranda were at least passable, some cousin or other always showed up smiling, in holiday mood, to take them to the races, where they were given a dollar each to bet on any horse they chose. There were black Saturdays now and then, when Maria and Miranda sat ready, hats in hand, curly hair plastered down and slicked behind their ears, their stiffly pleated navy-blue skirts spread out around them, waiting with their hearts going down slowly into their high-topped laced-up black shoes. They never put on their hats until the last minute, for somehow it would have been too horrible to have their hats on, when, after all, Cousin Henry and Cousin Isabel, or Uncle George and Aunt Polly, were not coming to take them to the races. When no one appeared, and Saturday came and went a sickening waste, they were then given to understand that it was a punishment for bad marks during the week. They never knew until it was too late to avoid the disappointment. It was very wearing.

One Saturday they were sent down to wait in the visitors' parlor, and there was their father. He had come all the way from Texas to see them. They leaped at sight of him, and then stopped short, suspiciously. Was he going to take them to the races? If so, they were happy to see him.

"Hello," said father, kissing their cheeks. "Have you been good girls? Your Uncle Gabriel is running a mare at the Crescent City today, so we'll all go and bet on her. Would you like that?"

Maria put on her hat without a word, but Miranda stood and addressed her father sternly. She had suffered many doubts this day. "*Why* didn't you send word yesterday. I could have been looking forward all this time."

"We didn't know," said father, in his easiest paternal manner, "that you were going to deserve it. Remember Saturday before last?"

Miranda hung her head and put on her hat, with the round elastic under the chin. She remembered too well. She had, in mid-week, given way to despair over her arithmetic and had fallen flat on her face on the classroom floor, refusing to rise until she was carried out. The rest of the week had been a series of novel deprivations, and Saturday a day of mourning; secret mourning, for if one mourned too noisily, it simply meant another bad mark against deportment.

"Never mind," said father, as if it were the smallest possible matter, "today you're going. Come along now, we've barely time."

These expeditions were all joy, every time, from the moment they stepped into a closed one-horse cab, a treat in itself with its dark, thick upholstery, soaked with strange perfumes and tobacco smoke, until the thrilling moment when they walked into a restaurant under big lights and were given dinner with things to eat they never had at home, much less at the convent. They felt worldly and grown up, each with her glass of water colored pink with claret.

The great crowd was always exciting as if they had never seen it before, with the beautiful, incredibly dressed ladies, all plumes and flowers and paint, and the elegant gentlemen with yellow gloves. The bands played in turn with thundering drums and brasses, and now and then a wild beautiful horse would career around the track with a tiny, monkey-shaped boy on his back, limbering up for his race.

Miranda had a secret personal interest in all this which she knew better than to confide to anyone, even Maria. Least of all to Maria. In ten minutes the whole family would have known. She had lately decided to be a jockey when she grew up. Her father had said one day that she was going to be a little thing all her life, she would ♥

never be tall; and this meant, of course, that she would never be a beauty like Aunt Amy, or Cousin Isabel. Her hope of being a beauty died hard, until the notion of being a jockey came suddenly and filled all her thoughts. Quietly, blissfully, at night before she slept, and too often in the daytime when she should have been studying, she planned her career as jockey. It was dim in detail, but brilliant at the right distance. It seemed too silly to worry about arithmetic at all, when what she needed for her future was to ride better—much better. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” said father, after watching her gallop full tilt down the lane at the farm, on Trixie, the mustang mare. “I can see the sun, moon, and stars between you and the saddle, every jump.” Spanish style meant that one sat close to the saddle, and did all kinds of things with the knees and reins. Jockeys bounced lightly, their knees almost level with the horse’s back, rising and falling like a rubber ball. Miranda felt she could do that easily. Yes, she would be a jockey, like Tod Sloan, winning every other race at least. Meantime, while she was training, she would keep it a secret, and one day she would ride out, bouncing lightly, with the other jockeys, and win a great race, and surprise everybody, her family most of all.

On that particular Saturday, her idol, the great Tod Sloan, was riding, and he won two races. Miranda longed to bet her dollar on Tod Sloan, but father said, “Not now, honey. Today you must bet on Uncle Gabriel’s horse. Save your dollar for the fourth race, and put it on Miss Lucy. You’ve got a hundred to one shot. Think if she wins.”

Miranda knew well enough that a hundred to one shot was no bet at all. She sulked, the crumpled dollar in her hand grew damp and warm. She could have won three dollars already on Tod Sloan. Maria said virtuously, “It wouldn’t be nice not to bet on Uncle Gabriel. That way, we keep the money in the family.” Miranda put out her underlip at her sister. Maria was too prissy for words. She wrinkled her nose back at Miranda.

They had just turned their dollar over to the bookmaker for the fourth race when a vast bulging man with a red face and immense tan ragged mustaches fading into gray hailed them from a lower level of the grandstand, over the heads of the crowd, “Hey, there, Harry!” Father said, “Bless my soul, there’s Gabriel.” He motioned to the man, who came pushing his way heavily up the shallow steps.

Maria and Miranda stared, first at him, then at each other. "Can that be our Uncle Gabriel?" their eyes asked. "Is that Aunt Amy's handsome romantic beau? Is that the man who wrote the poem about our Aunt Amy?" Oh, what did grown-up people *mean* when they talked, anyway?

He was a shabby fat man with bloodshot blue eyes, sad beaten eyes, and a big melancholy laugh, like a groan. He towered over them shouting to their father, "Well, for God's sake, Harry, it's been a coon's age. You ought to come out and look 'em over. You look just like yourself, Harry, how are you?"

The band struck up "Over the River" and Uncle Gabriel shouted louder. "Come on, let's get out of this. What are you doing up here with the pikers?"

"Can't," shouted father. "Brought my little girls. Here they are."

Uncle Gabriel's bleared eyes beamed blindly upon them. "Fine looking set, Harry," he bellowed, "pretty as pictures, how old are they?"

"Ten and fourteen now," said father, "awkward ages. Nest of vipers," he boasted, "perfect batch of serpent's teeth. Can't do a thing with 'em." He fluffed up Miranda's hair, pretending to tousle it.

"Pretty as pictures," bawled Uncle Gabriel, "but rolled into one they don't come up to Amy, do they?"

"No, they don't," admitted their father cheerfully, "but they're only half-baked." *Over the river, over the river*, moaned the band, *my sweetheart's waiting for me*.

"I've got to get back now," yelled Uncle Gabriel. The little girls felt quite deaf and confused. "Got the God-damnedest jockey in the world, Harry, just my luck. Ought to tie him on. Fell off Fiddler yesterday, just plain fell off on his tail— Remember Amy's mare, Miss Lucy? Well, this is her namesake, Miss Lucy IV. None of 'em ever came up to the first one, though. Stay right where you are, I'll be back."

Maria spoke up boldly. "Uncle Gabriel, tell Miss Lucy we're betting on her." Uncle Gabriel bent down and it looked as if there were tears in his swollen eyes. "God bless your sweet heart," he bellowed, "I'll tell her." He plunged down through the crowd again,

his fat back bowed slightly in his loose clothes, his thick neck rolling over his collar.

Miranda and Maria, disheartened by the odds, by their first sight of their romantic Uncle Gabriel, whose language was so coarse, sat listlessly without watching, their chances missed, their dollars gone, their hearts sore. They didn't even move until their father leaned over and hauled them up. "Watch your horse," he said, in a quick warning voice, "watch Miss Lucy come home."

They stood up, scrambled to their feet on the bench, every vein in them suddenly beating so violently they could hardly focus their eyes, and saw a thin little mahogany-colored streak flash by the judges' stand, only a neck ahead, but their Miss Lucy, oh, their darling, their lovely—oh, Miss Lucy, their Uncle Gabriel's Miss Lucy, had won, had won. They leaped up and down screaming and clapping their hands, their hats falling back on their shoulders, their hair flying wild. *Whoa, you heifer*, squalled the band with snorting brasses, and the crowd broke into a long roar like the falling of the walls of Jericho.

The little girls sat down, feeling quite dizzy, while their father tried to pull their hats straight, and taking out his handkerchief held it to Miranda's face saying very gently, "Here, blow your nose," and he dried her eyes while he was about it. He stood up then and shook them out of their daze. He was smiling with deep laughing wrinkles around his eyes, and spoke to them as if they were grown young ladies he was squiring around.

"Let's go out and pay our respects to Miss Lucy," he said. "She's the star of the day."

The horses were coming in, looking as if their hides had been drenched and rubbed with soap, their ribs heaving, their nostrils flaring and closing. The jockeys sat bowed and relaxed, their faces calm, moving a little at the waist with the movement of their horses. Miranda noted this for future use; that was the way you came in from a race, easy and quiet, whether you had won or lost. Miss Lucy came last, and a little handful of winners applauded her and cheered the jockey. He smiled and lifted his whip, his eyes and shriveled brown face perfectly serene. Miss Lucy was bleeding at the nose, two thick red rivulets were stiffening her tender mouth and chin, the round velvet chin that Miranda thought the nicest kind of chin

in the world. Miss Lucy's eyes were wild and her knees were trembling, and she snored when she drew her breath.

Miranda stood staring. That was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight: that was winning, for Miss Lucy. So instantly and completely did her heart reject that victory, she did not know when it happened, but she hated it, and was ashamed that she had screamed and shed tears for joy when Miss Lucy, with her bloodied nose and bursting heart, had gone past the judges' stand a neck ahead. She felt empty and sick and held to her father's hand so hard that he shook her off a little impatiently and said, "What is the matter with you? Don't be so fidgety."

Uncle Gabriel was standing there waiting, and he was completely drunk. He watched the mare go in, then leaned against the fence with its whitewashed posts and sobbed openly. "She's got the nosebleed, Harry," he said. "Had it since yesterday. We thought we had her all fixed up. But she did it, all right. She's got a heart like a lion. I'm going to breed her, Harry. Her heart's worth a million dollars, by itself, God bless her." Tears ran over his brick-colored face and into his straggling mustaches. "If anything happens to her now I'll blow my brains out. She's my last hope. She saved my life. I've had a run," he said, groaning into a large handkerchief and mopping his face all over, "I've had a run of luck that would break a brass billy goat. God, Harry, let's go somewhere and have a drink."

"I must get the children back to school first, Gabriel," said their father, taking each by a hand.

"No, no, don't go yet," said Uncle Gabriel desperately. "Wait here a minute, I want to see the vet and take a look at Miss Lucy, and I'll be right back. Don't go, Harry, for God's sake. I want to talk to you a few minutes."

Maria and Miranda, watching Uncle Gabriel's lumbering, unsteady back, were thinking that this was the first time they had ever seen a man that they knew to be drunk. They had seen pictures and read descriptions, and had heard descriptions, so they recognized the symptoms at once. Miranda felt it was an important moment in a great many ways.

"Uncle Gabriel's a drunkard, isn't he?" she asked her father, rather proudly.

"Hush, don't say such things," said father, with a heavy frown, "or I'll never bring you here again." He looked worried and unhappy, and, above all, undecided. The little girls stood stiff with resentment against such obvious injustice. They loosed their hands from his and moved away coldly, standing together in silence. Their father did not notice, watching the place where Uncle Gabriel had disappeared. In a few minutes he came back, still wiping his face, as if there were cobwebs on it, carrying his big black hat. He waved at them from a short distance, calling out in a cheerful way, "She's going to be all right, Harry. It's stopped now. Lord, this will be good news for Miss Honey. Come on, Harry, let's all go home and tell Miss Honey. She deserves some good news."

Father said, "I'd better take the children back to school first, then we'll go."

"No, no," said Uncle Gabriel, fondly. "I want her to see the girls. She'll be tickled pink to see them, Harry. Bring 'em along."

"Is it another race horse we're going to see?" whispered Miranda in her sister's ear.

"Don't be silly," said Maria. "It's Uncle Gabriel's second wife."

"Let's find a cab, Harry," said Uncle Gabriel, "and take your little girls out to cheer up Miss Honey. Both of 'em rolled into one look a lot like Amy, I swear they do. I want Miss Honey to see them. She's always liked our family, Harry, though of course she's not what you'd call an expansive kind of woman."

Maria and Miranda sat facing the driver, and Uncle Gabriel squeezed himself in facing them beside their father. The air became at once bitter and sour with his breathing. He looked sad and poor. His necktie was on crooked and his shirt was rumpled. Father said, "You're going to see Uncle Gabriel's second wife, children," exactly as if they had not heard everything; and to Gabriel, "How is your wife nowadays? It must be twenty years since I saw her last."

"She's pretty gloomy, and that's a fact," said Uncle Gabriel. "She's been pretty gloomy for years now, and nothing seems to shake her out of it. She never did care for horses, Harry, if you remember; she hasn't been near the track three times since we were married. When I think how Amy wouldn't have missed a race for anything . . . She's very different from Amy, Harry, a very different kind of woman. As fine a woman as ever lived, in her own

way, but she hates change and moving around, and she just lives in the boy."

"Where is Gabe now?" asked father.

"Finishing college," said Uncle Gabriel, "a smart boy, but awfully like his mother. Awfully like," he said, in a melancholy way. "She hates being away from him. Just wants to sit down in the same town and wait for him to get through with his education. Well, I'm sorry it can't be done if that's what she wants, but God Almighty—And this last run of luck has about got her down. I hope you'll be able to cheer her up a little, Harry, she needs it."

The little girls sat watching the streets grow duller and dingier and narrower, and at last the shabbier and shabbier white people gave way to dressed-up negroes, and then to shabby negroes, and after a long way the cab stopped before a desolate-looking little hotel in Elysian Fields. Their father helped Maria and Miranda out, told the cabman to wait, and they followed Uncle Gabriel through a dirty damp patio, down a long gas-lighted hall full of a terrible smell, Miranda couldn't decide what it was made of but it had a bitter taste even, and up a long staircase with a ragged carpet. Uncle Gabriel pushed open a door without warning, saying, "Come in, here we are."

A tall pale-faced woman with faded straw-colored hair and pink-rimmed eyelids rose suddenly from a squeaking rocking chair. She wore a stiff blue-and-white-striped shirtwaist and a stiff black skirt of some hard shiny material. Her large knuckled hands rose to her round, neat pompadour at sight of her visitors.

"Honey," said Uncle Gabriel, with large false heartiness, "you'll never guess who's come to see you." He gave her a clumsy hug. Her face did not change and her eyes rested steadily on the three strangers. "Amy's brother Harry, Honey, you remember, don't you?"

"Of course," said Miss Honey, putting out her hand straight as a paddle, "of course I remember you, Harry." She did not smile.

"And Amy's two little nieces," went on Uncle Gabriel, bringing them forward. They put out their hands limply; Miss Honey gave each one a slight flip and dropped it. "And we've got good news for you," went on Uncle Gabriel, trying to bolster up the painful situation. "Miss Lucy stepped out and showed 'em today, Honey. We're going to be rich again, old girl, cheer up."

Miss Honey turned her long, despairing face towards her visitors. "Sit down," she said with a heavy sigh, seating herself and motioning towards various rickety chairs. There was a big lumpy bed, with a grayish-white counterpane on it, a marble-topped washstand, grayish coarse lace curtains on strings at the two small windows, a small closed fireplace with a hole in it for a stovepipe, and two trunks, standing at odds as if somebody were just moving in, or just moving out. Everything was dingy and soiled and neat and bare; not a pin out of place.

"We'll move to the St. Charles tomorrow," said Uncle Gabriel, as much to Harry as to his wife. "Get your best dresses together, Honey, the long dry spell is over."

Miss Honey's nostrils pinched together and she rocked slightly, with her arms folded. "I've lived in the St. Charles before, and I've lived here before," she said, in a tight deliberate voice, "and this time I'll just stay where I am, thank you. I prefer it to moving back here in three months. I'm settled now, I feel at home here," she told him, glancing at Harry, her pale eyes kindling with blue fire, a stiff white line around her mouth.

The little girls sat trying not to stare, miserably ill at ease. Their grandmother had pronounced Harry's children to be the most unteachable she had ever seen in her long experience with the young; but they had learned by indirection one thing well—nice people did not carry on quarrels before outsiders. Family quarrels were sacred, to be waged privately in fierce hissing whispers, low choked mutters and growls. If people did yell and stamp, it must be behind closed doors and windows. Uncle Gabriel's second wife was hopping mad and she looked ready to fly out at Uncle Gabriel any second, with him sitting there like a hound when someone shakes a whip at him.

"She loathes and despises everybody in this room," thought Miranda, coolly, "and she's afraid we won't know it. She needn't worry, we knew it when we came in." With all her heart she wanted to go, but her father, though his face was a study, made no move. He seemed to be trying to think of something pleasant to say. Maria, feeling guilty, though she couldn't think why, was calculating rapidly, "Why, she's only Uncle Gabriel's second wife, and Uncle Gabriel was only married before to Aunt Amy, why, she's no kin at all, and I'm glad of it." Sitting back easily, she let her hands fall

open in her lap; they would be going in a few minutes, undoubtedly, and they need never come back.

Then father said, "We mustn't be keeping you, we just dropped in for a few minutes. We wanted to see how you are."

Miss Honey said nothing, but she made a little gesture with her hands, from the wrist, as if to say, "Well, you see how I am, and now what next?"

"I must take these young ones back to school," said father, and Uncle Gabriel said stupidly, "Look, Honey, don't you think they resemble Amy a little? Especially around the eyes, especially Maria, don't you think, Harry?"

Their father glanced at them in turn. "I really couldn't say," he decided, and the little girls saw he was more monstrously embarrassed than ever. He turned to Miss Honey, "I hadn't seen Gabriel for so many years," he said, "we thought of getting out for a talk about old times together. You know how it is."

"Yes, I know," said Miss Honey, rocking a little, and all that she knew gleamed forth in a pallid, unquenchable hatred and bitterness that seemed enough to bring her long body straight up out of the chair in a fury, "I know," and she sat staring at the floor. Her mouth shook and straightened. There was a terrible silence, which was broken when the little girls saw their father rise. They got up, too, and it was all they could do to keep from making a dash for the door.

"I must get the young ones back," said father. "They've had enough excitement for one day. They each won a hundred dollars on Miss Lucy. It was a good race," he said, in complete wretchedness, as if he simply could not extricate himself from the situation. "Wasn't it, Gabriel?"

"It was a grand race," said Gabriel, brokenly, "a grand race."

Miss Honey stood up and moved a step towards the door. "Do you take them to the races, actually?" she asked, and her lids flickered towards them as if they were loathsome insects, Maria felt.

"If I feel they deserve a little treat, yes," said their father, in an easy tone but with wrinkled brow.

"I had rather, much rather," said Miss Honey clearly, "see my son dead at my feet than hanging around a race track."

The next few moments were rather a blank, but at last they were out of it, going down the stairs, across the patio, with Uncle Gabriel seeing them back into the cab. His face was sagging, the features had

fallen as if the flesh had slipped from the bones, and his eyelids were puffed and blue. "Good-by, Harry," he said soberly. "How long you expect to be here?"

"Starting back tomorrow," said Harry. "Just dropped in on a little business and to see how the girls were getting along."

"Well," said Uncle Gabriel, "I may be dropping into your part of the country one of these days. Good-by, children," he said, taking their hands one after the other in his big warm paws. "They're nice children, Harry. I'm glad you won on Miss Lucy," he said to the little girls, tenderly. "Don't spend your money foolishly, now. Well, so-long, Harry." As the cab jolted away he stood there fat and sagging, holding up his arm and wagging his hand at them.

"Goodness," said Maria, in her most grown-up manner, taking her hat off and hanging it over her knee, "I'm glad that's over."

"What I want to know is," said Miranda, "is Uncle Gabriel a real drunkard?"

"Oh, hush," said their father, sharply, "I've got the heartburn."

There was a respectful pause, as before a public monument. When their father had the heartburn it was time to lay low. The cab rumbled on, back to clean gay streets, with the lights coming on in the early February darkness, past shimmering shopwindows, smooth pavements, on and on, past beautiful old houses set in deep gardens, on, on back to the dark walls with the heavy-topped trees hanging over them. Miranda sat so absorbed she forgot and spoke out in her thoughtless way: "I've decided I'm not going to be a jockey, after all." She could as usual have bitten her tongue, but as usual it was too late.

Father cheered up and twinkled at her knowingly, as if that didn't surprise him in the least. "Well, well," said he, "so you aren't going to be a jockey! That's very sensible of you. I think that she ought to be a lion-tamer, don't you, Maria? That's a nice, womanly profession."

Miranda, seeing Maria from the height of her fourteen years suddenly joining with their father to laugh at her, made an instant decision and laughed with them at herself. That was better. Everybody laughed and it was such a relief.

"Where's my hundred dollars?" asked Maria, anxiously.

"It's going in the bank," said their father, "and yours too," he told Miranda. "That is your nest egg."

"Just so they don't buy my stockings with it," said Miranda, who had long resented the use of her Christmas money by their grandmother. "I've got enough stockings to last me a year."

"I'd like to buy a race horse," said Maria, "but I know it's not enough." The limitations of wealth oppressed her. "*What* could you buy with a hundred dollars?" she asked fretfully.

"Nothing, nothing at all," said their father, "a hundred dollars is just something you put in the bank."

Maria and Miranda lost interest. They had each won a hundred dollars on a horse race, once. It was already in the far past. They began to chatter about something else.

The lay sister opened the door on a long cord, from behind the grille; Maria and Miranda walked in silently to their familiar world of shining bare floors and insipid wholesome food and cold-water washing and regular prayers; their world of poverty, chastity, and obedience, of early to bed and early to rise, of sharp little rules and tittle-tattle. Resignation was in their childish faces as they held them up to be kissed.

"Be good girls," said their father, in the strange, serious, rather helpless way he always had when he told them good-by. "Write to your Daddy, now, nice long letters," he said, holding their arms firmly for a moment before letting go for good. Then he disappeared, and the sister swung the door closed after him.

Maria and Miranda went upstairs to the dormitory to wash their faces and hands and slick down their hair again before supper.

Miranda was hungry. "We didn't have a thing to eat, after all," she grumbled. "Not even a chocolate nut bar. I think that's mean. We didn't even get a quarter to spend," she said.

"Not a living bite," said Maria. "Not a nickel." She poured cold water into the bowl and rolled up her sleeves.

Another girl about her own age came in and went to a washbowl near another bed. "Where have you been?" she asked. "Did you have a good time?"

"We went to the races, with our father," said Maria, soaping her hands.

"Our uncle's horse won," said Miranda.

"My goodness," said the other girl, vaguely, "that must have been grand."

Maria looked at Miranda, who was rolling up her own sleeves. She tried to feel martyred, but it wouldn't go. "Immured for another week," she said, her eyes sparkling over the edge of her towel.

PART THREE: 1912

Miranda followed the porter down the stuffy aisle of the sleeping car, where the berths were nearly all made down and the dusty green curtains buttoned, to a seat at the further end. "Now yo' berth's ready any time, Miss," said the porter.

"But I want to sit up awhile," said Miranda. A very thin old lady raised choleric black eyes and fixed upon her a regard of un-mixed disapproval. She had two immense front teeth and a receding chin, but she did not lack character. She had piled her luggage around her like a barricade, and she glared at the porter when he picked some of it up to make room for his new passenger. Miranda sat, saying mechanically, "May I?"

"You may, indeed," said the old lady, for she seemed old in spite of a certain brisk, rustling energy. Her taffeta petticoat creaked like hinges every time she stirred. With ferocious sarcasm, after a half second's pause, she added, "You may be so good as to get off my hat!"

Miranda rose instantly in horror, and handed to the old lady a wilted contrivance of black horsehair braid and shattered white poppies. "I'm dreadfully sorry," she stammered, for she had been brought up to treat ferocious old ladies respectfully, and this one seemed capable of spanking her then and there. "I didn't dream it was your hat."

"And whose hat did you dream it might be?" inquired the old lady, baring her teeth and twirling the hat on a forefinger to restore it.

"I didn't think it was a hat at all," said Miranda with a touch of hysteria.

"Oh, you didn't think it was a hat? Where on earth are your eyes, child?" and she proved the nature and function of the object by placing it on her head at a somewhat tipsy angle, though still it did not much resemble a hat. "Now can you see what it is?"

"Yes, oh yes," said Miranda, with a meekness she hoped was disarming. She ventured to sit again after a careful inspection of the narrow space she was to occupy.

"Well, well," said the old lady, "let's have the porter remove some of these encumbrances," and she stabbed the bell with a lean sharp forefinger. There followed a flurry of rearrangements, during which they both stood in the aisle, the old lady giving a series of impossible directions to the negro which he bore philosophically while he disposed of the luggage exactly as he had meant to do. Seated again, the old lady asked in a kindly, authoritative tone, "And what might your name be, child?"

At Miranda's answer, she blinked somewhat, unfolded her spectacles, straddled them competently across her high nose, and took a good long look at the face beside her.

"If I'd had my spectacles on," she said, in an astonishingly changed voice, "I might have known. I'm Cousin Eva Parrington," she said, "Cousin Molly Parrington's daughter, remember? I knew you when you were a little girl. You were a lively little girl," she added as if to console her, "and very opinionated. The last thing I heard about you, you were planning to be a tightrope walker. You were going to play the violin and walk the tightrope at the same time."

"I must have seen it at the vaudeville show," said Miranda. "I couldn't have invented it. Now I'd like to be an air pilot!"

"I used to go to dances with your father," said Cousin Eva, busy with her own thoughts, "and to big holiday parties at your grandmother's house, long before you were born. Oh indeed, yes, a long time before."

Miranda remembered several things at once. Aunt Amy had threatened to be an old maid, like Eva. Oh, Eva, the trouble with her is she has no chin. Eva has given up, and is teaching Latin in a Female Seminary. Eva's gone out for votes for women, God help her. The nice thing about an ugly daughter is, she's not apt to make me a grandmother . . . "They didn't do you much good, those parties, dear Cousin Eva," thought Miranda.

"They didn't do me much good, those parties," said Cousin Eva aloud as if she were a mind reader, and Miranda's head swam for a moment with fear that she had herself spoken aloud. "Or at least,

they didn't serve their purpose, for I never got married; but I enjoyed them, just the same. I had a good time at those parties, even if I wasn't a belle. And so you are Harry's child, and here I was quarreling with you. You do remember me, don't you?"

"Yes," said Miranda, and thinking that even if Cousin Eva had been really an old maid ten years before, still she couldn't be much past fifty now, and she looked so withered and tired, so famished and sunken in the cheeks, so *old*, somehow. Across the abyss separating Cousin Eva from her own youth, Miranda looked with painful premonition. "Oh, must I ever be like that?"

She said aloud, "Yes, you used to read Latin to me, and tell me not to bother about the sense, to get the sound in my mind, and it would come easier later."

"Ah, so I did," said Cousin Eva delighted. "So I did. You don't happen to remember that I once had a beautiful sapphire velvet dress with a train on it?"

"No, I don't remember that dress," said Miranda.

"It was an old dress of my mother's made over and cut down to fit," said Eva, "and it wasn't in the least becoming to me, but it was the only really good dress I ever had, and I remember it as if it were yesterday. Blue was never my color." She sighed with a humorous bitterness. The humor seemed momentary, but the bitterness was a constant state of mind.

Miranda, trying to offer the sympathy of fellow suffering, said, "I know. I've had Maria's dresses made over for me, and they were never right. It was dreadful."

"Well," said Cousin Eva, in the tone of one who did not wish to share her unique disappointments, "how is your father? I always liked him. He was one of the finest-looking young men I ever saw. Vain, too, like all his family. He wouldn't ride any but the best horses he could buy, and I used to say he made them prance and then watched his own shadow. I used to tell this on him at dinner parties, and he hated me for it. I feel pretty certain he hated me." An overtone of complacency in Cousin Eva's voice explained better than words that she had her own method of commanding attention and arousing emotion. "How *is* your father, I asked you, my dear?"

"I haven't seen him for nearly a year," answered Miranda,

quickly, before Cousin Eva could get ahead again. "I'm going home now to Uncle Gabriel's funeral; you know, Uncle Gabriel died in Lexington and they have brought him back to be buried beside Aunt Amy."

"So that's how we meet," said Cousin Eva. "Yes, Gabriel drank himself to death at last. I'm going to the funeral, too. I haven't been home since I went to mother's funeral, it must be, let's see, yes, it will be nine years next July. I'm going to Gabriel's funeral, though. I wouldn't miss that. Poor fellow, what a life he had. Pretty soon, they'll all be gone."

Miranda said, "We're left, Cousin Eva," meaning those of her own generation, the young, and Cousin Eva said, "Pshaw, you'll live forever, and you won't bother to come to our funerals." She didn't seem to think this was a misfortune, but flung the remark from her like a woman accustomed to say what she thought.

Miranda sat thinking, "Still, I suppose it would be pleasant if I could say something to make her believe that she and all of them would be lamented, but—but—" With a smile which she hoped would be her denial of Cousin Eva's cynicism about the younger generation, she said, "You were right about the Latin, Cousin Eva, your reading did help when I began with it. I still study," she said. "Latin, too."

"And why shouldn't you?" asked Cousin Eva, sharply, adding at once mildly, "I'm glad you are going to use your mind a little, child. Don't let yourself rust away. Your mind outwears all sorts of things you may set your heart upon; you can enjoy it when all other things are taken away." Miranda was chilled by her melancholy. Cousin Eva went on: "In our part of the country, in my time, we were so provincial—a woman didn't dare to think or act for herself. The whole world was a little that way," she said, "but we were the worst, I believe. I suppose you must know how I fought for votes for women when it almost made a pariah of me—I was turned out of my chair at the Seminary, but I'm glad I did it and I would do it again. You young things don't realize. You'll live in a better world because we worked for it."

Miranda knew something of Cousin Eva's career. She said sincerely, "I think it was brave of you, and I'm glad you did it, too. I loved your courage."

"It wasn't just showing off, mind you," said Cousin Eva, reject- ♥

ing praise, fretfully. "Any fool can be brave. We were working for something we knew was right, and it turned out that we needed a lot of courage for it. That was all. I didn't expect to go to jail, but I went three times, and I'd go three times three more if it were necessary. We aren't voting yet," she said, "but we will be."

Miranda did not venture any answer, but she felt convinced that indeed women would be voting soon if nothing fatal happened to Cousin Eva. There was something in her manner which said such things could be left safely to her. Miranda was dimly fired for the cause herself; it seemed heroic and worth suffering for, but discouraging, too, to those who came after: Cousin Eva so plainly had swept the field clear of opportunity.

They were silent for a few minutes, while Cousin Eva rummaged in her handbag, bringing up odds and ends: peppermint drops, eye drops, a packet of needles, three handkerchiefs, a little bottle of violet perfume, a book of addresses, two buttons, one black, one white, and, finally, a packet of headache powders.

"Bring me a glass of water, will you, my dear?" she asked Miranda. She poured the headache powder on her tongue, swallowed the water, and put two peppermints in her mouth.

"So now they're going to bury Gabriel near Amy," she said after a while, as if her eased headache had started her on a new train of thought. "Miss Honey would like that, poor dear, if she could know. After listening to stories about Amy for twenty-five years, she must lie alone in her grave in Lexington while Gabriel sneaks off to Texas to make his bed with Amy again. It was a kind of lifelong infidelity, Miranda, and now an eternal infidelity on top of that. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"It was Aunt Amy he loved," said Miranda, wondering what Miss Honey could have been like before her long troubles with Uncle Gabriel. "First, anyway."

"Oh, that Amy," said Cousin Eva, her eyes glittering. "Your Aunt Amy was a devil and a mischief-maker, but I loved her dearly. I used to stand up for Amy when her reputation wasn't worth that." Her fingers snapped like castanets. "She used to say to me, in that gay soft way she had, 'Now, Eva, don't go talking votes for women when the lads ask you to dance. Don't recite Latin poems to 'em,' she would say, 'they got sick of that in school. Dance and say nothing, Eva,' she would say, her eyes perfectly devilish, 'and hold

your chin up, Eva.' My chin was my weak point, you see. 'You'll never catch a husband if you don't look out,' she would say. Then she would laugh and fly away, and where did she fly to?" demanded Cousin Eva, her sharp eyes pinning Miranda down to the bitter facts of the case. "To scandal and to death, nowhere else."

"She was joking, Cousin Eva," said Miranda, innocently, "and everybody loved her."

"Not everybody, by a long shot," said Cousin Eva in triumph. "She had enemies. If she knew, she pretended she didn't. If she cared, she never said. You couldn't make her quarrel. She was sweet as a honeycomb to everybody. *Everybody*," she added, "that was the trouble. She went through life like a spoiled darling, doing as she pleased and letting other people suffer for it, and pick up the pieces after her. I never believed for one moment," said Cousin Eva, putting her mouth close to Miranda's ear and breathing peppermint hotly into it, "that Amy was an impure woman. Never! But let me tell you, there were plenty who did believe it. There were plenty to pity poor Gabriel for being so completely blinded by her. A great many persons were not surprised when they heard that Gabriel was perfectly miserable all the time, on their honeymoon, in New Orleans. Jealousy. And why not? But I used to say to such persons that, no matter what the appearances were, I had faith in Amy's virtue. Wild, I said, indiscreet, I said, heartless, I said, but *virtuous*, I feel certain. But you could hardly blame anyone for being mystified. The way she rose up suddenly from death's door to marry Gabriel Breaux, after refusing him and treating him like a dog for years, looked odd, to say the least. To say the very least," she added, after a moment, "odd is a mild word for it. And there was something very mysterious about her death, only six weeks after marriage."

Miranda roused herself. She felt she knew this part of the story and could set Cousin Eva right about one thing. "She died of a hemorrhage from the lungs," said Miranda. "She had been ill for five years, don't you remember?"

Cousin Eva was ready for that. "Ha, that was the story, indeed. The official account, you might say. Oh, yes, I heard that often enough. But did you ever hear about the fellow Raymond Somebody-or-other from Calcasieu Parish, almost a stranger, who persuaded Amy to elope with him from a dance one night, and she just ran out

into the darkness without even stopping for her cloak, and your poor dear nice father Harry—you weren't even thought of then—had to run him down to earth and shoot him?"

Miranda leaned back from the advancing flood of speech. "Cousin Eva, my father shot *at* him, don't you remember? He didn't hit him . . ."

"Well, that's a pity."

". . . and they had only gone out for a breath of air between dances. It was Uncle Gabriel's jealousy. And my father shot at the man because he thought that was better than letting Uncle Gabriel fight a duel about Aunt Amy. There was *nothing* in the whole affair except Uncle Gabriel's jealousy."

"You poor baby," said Cousin Eva, and pity gave a light like daggers to her eyes, "you dear innocent, you—do you believe that? How old are you, anyway?"

"Just past eighteen," said Miranda.

"If you don't understand what I tell you," said Cousin Eva portentously, "you will later. Knowledge can't hurt you. You mustn't live in a romantic haze about life. You'll understand when you're married, at any rate."

"I'm married now, Cousin Eva," said Miranda, feeling for almost the first time that it might be an advantage, "nearly a year. I eloped from school." It seemed very unreal even as she said it, and seemed to have nothing at all to do with the future; still, it was important, it must be declared, it was a situation in life which people seemed to be most exacting about, and the only feeling she could rouse in herself about it was an immense weariness as if it were an illness that she might one day hope to recover from.

"Shameful, shameful," cried Cousin Eva, genuinely repelled. "If you had been my child I should have brought you home and spanked you."

Miranda laughed out. Cousin Eva seemed to believe things could be arranged like that. She was so solemn and fierce, so comic and baffled.

"And you must know I should have just gone straight out again, through the nearest window," she taunted her. "If I went the first time, why not the second?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Cousin Eva. "I hope you married rich."

"Not so very," said Miranda. "Enough." As if anyone could have stopped to think of such a thing!

Cousin Eva adjusted her spectacles and sized up Miranda's dress, her luggage, examined her engagement ring and wedding ring, nostrils fairly quivering as if she might smell out wealth on her.

"Well, that's better than nothing," said Cousin Eva. "I thank God every day of my life that I have a small income. It's a Rock of Ages. What would have become of me if I hadn't a cent of my own? Well, you'll be able now to do something for your family."

Miranda remembered what she had always heard about the Parringtons. They were money-hungry, they loved money and nothing else, and when they had got some they kept it. Blood was thinner than water between the Parringtons where money was concerned.

"We're pretty poor," said Miranda, stubbornly allying herself with her father's family instead of her husband's, "but a rich marriage is no way out," she said, with the snobbishness of poverty. She was thinking, "You don't know my branch of the family, dear Cousin Eva, if you think it is."

"Your branch of the family," said Cousin Eva, with that terrifying habit she had of lifting phrases out of one's mind, "has no more practical sense than so many children. Everything for love," she said, with a face of positive nausea, "that was it. Gabriel would have been rich if his grandfather had not disinherited him, but would Amy be sensible and marry him and make him settle down so the old man would have been pleased with him? No. And what could Gabriel do without money? I wish you could have seen the life he led Miss Honey, one day buying her Paris gowns and the next day pawning her earrings. It just depended on how the horses ran, and they ran worse and worse, and Gabriel drank more and more."

Miranda did not say, "I saw a little of it." She was trying to imagine Miss Honey in a Paris gown. She said, "But Uncle Gabriel was so mad about Aunt Amy, there was no question of her not marrying him at last, money or no money."

Cousin Eva strained her lips tightly over her teeth, let them fly again and leaned over, gripping Miranda's arm. "What I ask myself, what I ask myself over and over again," she whispered, "is, what connection did this Raymond from Calcasieu have with Amy's sudden marriage to Gabriel, and *what* did Amy do to make away

with herself so soon afterward? For mark my words, child, Amy wasn't so ill as all that. She'd been flying around for years after the doctors said her lungs were weak. Amy did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced."

The beady black eyes glinted; Cousin Eva's face was quite frightening, so near and so intent. Miranda wanted to say, "Stop. Let her rest. What harm did she ever do you?" but she was timid and unnerved, and deep in her was a horrid fascination with the terrors and the darkness Cousin Eva had conjured up. What was the end of this story?

"She was a bad, wild girl, but I was fond of her to the last," said Cousin Eva, "she got into trouble somehow, and she couldn't get out again, and I have every reason to believe she killed herself with the drug they gave her to keep her quiet after a hemorrhage. If she didn't, what happened, what happened?"

"I don't know," said Miranda. "How should I know? She was very beautiful," she said, as if this explained everything, "everybody said she was very beautiful."

"Not everybody," said Cousin Eva, firmly, shaking her head. "I for one never thought so. They made entirely too much fuss over her. She was good-looking enough, but why did they think she was beautiful? I cannot understand it. She was too thin when she was young, and later I always thought she was too fat, and again in her last year she was altogether too thin. She always got herself up to be looked at, and so people looked, of course. She rode too hard, and she danced too freely, and she talked too much, and you'd have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to notice her. I don't mean she was loud or vulgar, she wasn't, but she was *too free*," said Cousin Eva. She stopped for breath and put a peppermint in her mouth. Miranda could see Cousin Eva on the platform, making her speeches, stopping to take a peppermint. But why did she hate Aunt Amy so, when Aunt Amy was dead and she alive? Wasn't being alive enough?

"And her illness wasn't romantic, either," said Cousin Eva, "though to hear them tell it she faded like a lily. Well, she coughed blood, if that's romantic. If they had made her take proper care of herself, if she had been nursed sensibly, she might have been alive today. But no, nothing of the kind. She lay wrapped in beautiful shawls on a sofa with flowers around her, eating as she liked or not

eating, getting up after a hemorrhage and going out to ride or dance, sleeping with the windows closed; with crowds coming in and out laughing and talking at all hours, and Amy sitting up so her hair wouldn't get out of curl. And why wouldn't that sort of thing kill a well person in time? I have almost died twice in my life," said Cousin Eva, "and both times I was sent to a hospital where I belonged and left there until I came out. And I came out," she said, her voice deepening to a bugle note, "and I went to work again."

"Beauty goes, character stays," said the small voice of axiomatic morality in Miranda's ear. It was a dreary prospect; why was a strong character so deforming? Miranda felt she truly wanted to be strong, but now could she face it, seeing what it did to one?

"She had a lovely complexion," said Cousin Eva, "perfectly transparent with a flush on each cheekbone. But it was tuberculosis, and is disease beautiful? And she brought it on herself by drinking lemon and salt to stop her periods when she wanted to go to dances. There was a superstition among young girls about that. They fancied that young men could tell what ailed them by touching their hands, or even by looking at them. As if it mattered. But they were terribly self-conscious and they had immense respect for man's worldly wisdom in those days. My own notion is that a man couldn't—but anyway, the whole thing was stupid."

"I should have thought they'd have stayed at home if they couldn't manage better than that," said Miranda, feeling very knowledgeable and modern.

"They didn't dare. Those parties and dances were their market, a girl couldn't afford to miss out, there were always rivals waiting to cut the ground from under her. The rivalry—" said Cousin Eva, and her head lifted; she arched like a cavalry horse getting a whiff of the battlefield, "You can't imagine what the rivalry was like. The way those girls treated each other—nothing was too mean, nothing too false—"

Cousin Eva wrung her hands. "It was just sex," she said in despair, "their minds dwelt on nothing else. They didn't call it that, it was all smothered under pretty names, but that's all it was, sex." She looked out of the window into the darkness, her sunken cheek near Miranda flushed deeply. She turned back. "I took to the soap box and the platform when I was called upon," she said proudly, "and I went to jail when it was necessary, and my condition didn't

make any difference. I was booed and jeered and shoved around just as if I had been in perfect health. But it was part of our philosophy not to let our physical handicaps make any difference to our work. You know what I mean," she said, as if until now it was all mystery. "Well, Amy carried herself with more spirit than the others, and she didn't seem to be making any sort of fight, but she was simply sex-ridden, like the rest. She behaved as if she hadn't a rival on earth, and she pretended not to know what marriage was about, but I know better. None of them had, and they didn't want to have, anything else to think about, and they didn't really know anything about that, so they simply festered inside—they festered—"

Miranda found herself deliberately watching a long procession of living corpses, festering women stepping gaily towards the charnel house, their corruption concealed under laces and flowers, their dead faces lifted smiling, and thought quite coldly, "Of course it was not like that. This is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic," and she realized that she was tired of her intense Cousin Eva, she wanted to go to sleep, she wanted to be at home, she wished it were tomorrow and she could see her father and her sister, who were so alive and solid; who would mention her freckles and ask her if she wanted something to eat.

"My mother was not like that," she said, childishly. "My mother was a perfectly natural woman who liked to cook. I have seen some of her sewing," she said. "I have read her diary."

"Your mother was a saint," said Cousin Eva, automatically.

Miranda sat silent, outraged. "My mother was nothing of the sort," she wanted to fling in Cousin Eva's big front teeth. But Cousin Eva had been gathering bitterness until more speech came of it.

"'Hold your chin up, Eva,' Amy used to tell me," she began, doubling up both her fists and shaking them a little. "All my life the whole family bedeviled me about my chin. My entire girlhood was spoiled by it. Can you imagine," she asked, with a ferocity that seemed much too deep for this one cause, "people who call themselves civilized spoiling life for a young girl because she had one unlucky feature? Of course, you understand perfectly it was all in the very best humor, everybody was very amusing about it, no harm meant—oh no, no harm at all. That is the hellish thing about it. It

is that I can't forgive," she cried out, and she twisted her hands together as if they were rags. "Ah, the family," she said, releasing her breath and sitting back quietly. "The whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth. It is the root of all human wrongs," she ended, and relaxed, and her face became calm. She was trembling. Miranda reached out and took Cousin Eva's hand and held it. The hand fluttered and lay still, and Cousin Eva said, "You've not the faintest idea what some of us went through, but I wanted you to hear the other side of the story. And I'm keeping you up when you need your beauty sleep," she said grimly, stirring herself with an immense rustle of petticoats.

Miranda pulled herself together, feeling limp, and stood up. Cousin Eva put out her hand again, and pulled Miranda down to her. "Good night, you dear child," she said, "to think you're grown up." Miranda hesitated, then quite suddenly kissed her Cousin Eva on the cheek. The black eyes shone brightly through water for an instant, and Cousin Eva said with a warm note in her sharp clear orator's voice, "Tomorrow we'll be at home again. I'm looking forward to it, aren't you? Good night."

Miranda fell asleep while she was getting off her clothes. Instantly it was morning again, she was still trying to close her suitcase when the train pulled into the small station, and there on the platform she saw her father, looking tired and anxious, his hat pulled over his eyes. She rapped on the window to catch his attention, then ran out and threw herself upon him. He said, "Well, here's my big girl," as if she were still seven, but his hands on her arms held her off, the tone was forced: there was no welcome for her, and there had not been since she had run away. She could not persuade herself to remember how it would be, between one home-coming and the next her mind refused to accept its own knowledge. Her father looked over her head and said, without surprise, "Why, hello, Eva, I'm glad somebody sent you a telegram." Miranda, rebuffed again, let her arms fall away again, with the same painful dull jerk of the heart.

"No one in my family," said Eva, her face framed in the thin black veil she reserved, evidently, for family funerals, "ever sent me a telegram in my life. I had the news from young Keziah who had it from young Gabriel. I suppose Gabe is here?"

"Everybody seems to be here," said father. "The house is getting full."

"I'll go to the hotel if you like," said Cousin Eva.

"Damnation, no," said father. "I didn't mean that. You'll come with us where you belong."

Skid, the handy man, grabbed the suitcases and started down the rocky village street. "We've still got the car," said father. He took Miranda by the hand, then dropped it again, and reached for Cousin Eva's elbow.

"I'm perfectly able, thank you," said Cousin Eva, shying away.

"If you're so independent now," said father, "God help us when you get that vote."

Cousin Eva pushed back her veil. She was smiling merrily. She liked Harry, she always had liked him, he could tease as much as he wished. She slipped her arm through his. "So it's all over with poor Gabriel, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes," said father, "it's all over, all right. They're pegging out pretty regularly now. It will be our turn next, Eva?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Eva, recklessly. "It's good to be back now and then, Harry, even if it is only for funerals. I feel sinfully cheerful."

"Oh, Gabriel wouldn't mind, he'd like seeing you cheerful. Gabriel was the cheerfullest cuss I ever saw, when we were young. Life for Gabriel," said father, "was just one perpetual picnic."

"Poor fellow," said Cousin Eva.

"Poor old Gabriel," said father, heavily.

Miranda walked along beside her father, feeling homeless, but not sorry for it. He had not forgiven her, she knew that. When would he? She could not guess, but she felt it would come of itself, without words and without acknowledgment on either side, for by the time it arrived neither of them would need to remember what had caused their division, nor why it had seemed so important. Surely old people cannot hold their grudges forever because the young want to live, too, she thought, in her arrogance, her pride. I will make my own mistakes, not yours; I cannot depend upon you beyond a certain point, why depend at all? There was something more beyond, but this was a first step to take, and she took it, walking in silence beside her elders who were no longer Cousin Eva and father,

since they had forgotten her presence, but had become Eva and Harry, who knew each other well, who were comfortable with each other, being contemporaries on equal terms, who occupied by right their place in this world, at the time of life to which they had arrived by paths familiar to them both. They need not play their roles of daughter, of son, to aged persons who did not understand them; nor of father and elderly female cousin to young persons whom they did not understand. They were precisely themselves; their eyes cleared, their voices relaxed into perfect naturalness, they need not weigh their words or calculate the effect of their manner. "It is I who have no place," thought Miranda. "Where are my own people and my own time?" She resented, slowly and deeply and in profound silence, the presence of these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes; who demanded that she accept their version of life and yet could not tell her the truth, not in the smallest thing. "I hate them both," her most inner and secret mind said plainly, "*I will be free of them, I shall not even remember them.*"

She sat in the front seat with Skid, the negro boy. "Come back with us, Miranda," said Cousin Eva, with the sharp little note of elderly command, "there is plenty of room."

"No, thank you," said Miranda, in a firm cold voice. "I'm quite comfortable. Don't disturb yourself."

Neither of them noticed her voice or her manner. They sat back and went on talking steadily in their friendly family voices, talking about their dead, their living, their affairs, their prospects, their common memories, interrupting each other, catching each other up on small points of dispute, laughing with a gaiety and freshness Miranda had not known they were capable of, going over old stories and finding new points of interest in them.

Miranda could not hear the stories above the noisy motor, but she felt she knew them well, or stories like them. She knew too many stories like them, she wanted something new of her own. The language was familiar to them, but not to her, not any more. The house, her father had said, was full. It would be full of cousins, many of them strangers. Would there be any young cousins there, to whom she could talk about things they both knew? She felt a vague distaste for seeing cousins. There were too many of them and her blood rebelled against the ties of blood. She was sick to death of cousins. ♥

She did not want any more ties with this house, she was going to leave it, and she was not going back to her husband's family either. She would have no more bonds that smothered her in love and hatred. She knew now why she had run away to marriage, and she knew that she was going to run away from marriage, and she was not going to stay in any place, with anyone, that threatened to forbid her making her own discoveries, that said "No" to her. She hoped no one had taken her old room, she would like to sleep there once more, she would say good-by there where she had loved sleeping once, sleeping and waking and waiting to be grown, to begin to live. Oh, what is life, she asked herself in desperate seriousness, in those childish unanswerable words, and what shall I do with it? It is something of my own, she thought in a fury of jealous possessiveness, what shall I make of it? She did not know that she asked herself this because all her earliest training had argued that life was a substance, a material to be used, it took shape and direction and meaning only as the possessor guided and worked it; living was a progress of continuous and varied acts of the will directed towards a definite end. She had been assured that there were good and evil ends, one must make a choice. But what was good, and what was evil? I hate love, she thought, as if this were the answer, I hate loving and being loved, I hate it. And her disturbed and seething mind received a shock of comfort from this sudden collapse of an old painful structure of distorted images and misconceptions. "You don't know anything about it," said Miranda to herself, with extraordinary clearness as if she were an elder admonishing some younger misguided creature. "You have to find out about it." But nothing in her prompted her to decide, "I will now do this, I will be that, I will go yonder, I will take a certain road to a certain end." There are questions to be asked first, she thought, but who will answer them? No one, or there will be too many answers, none of them right. What is the truth, she asked herself as intently as if the question had never been asked, the truth, even about the smallest, the least important of all the things I must find out? and where shall I begin to look for it? Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not the past but the legend of the past, other peoples' memory of the past, at which she had spent her life peering in wonder like a child at a magic-lantern show. Ah, but there is my own life to come yet, she thought, my own life now and beyond. I don't want any

promises, I won't have false hopes, I won't be romantic about myself. I can't live in their world any longer, she told herself, listening to the voices back of her. Let them tell their stories to each other. Let them go on explaining how things happened. I don't care. At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S BODY

Kay Boyle

THE SWANNERY had been established there, just on the edge of Lord Glourie's grounds, because it was here the swans had come of themselves since years, since centuries maybe, to feed on the weeds and to lead their own strong violent life in the lagoon. It lay a little piece beyond the swanherd's cottage, a narrow strip of brackish water running for a mile between the bank of shingles and the green swampy soil of England. In late April or early May, depending on how the year was, the swans began working and weaving anew, the old cobs staking their old claims out on the land and the water, and the newly mated birds, a little uncertain still, casting about for virgin ground in the rotting swamp of the lagoon.

On the tenth of May this year the swanherd, who had been up since light, was standing in his rubber boots in the water when Lady Glourie came along the path that ran high and dry through the towers of the swans' nests. He was a slight little man with a lock of graying hair thrusting from under the beak of his cloth cap, and his eyes light blue looking up at her coming, uneasy and faded like a beggar's or a drunkard's eyes to what was authority or charity or law.

"There's a bit of a hack-up going on," he said: and Lady Glourie said, "Ho, ho."

She was a woman of thirty-five or -six with a big pair of shoulders strong as a wood yoke set across her freckled neck. She slapped the breast pocket of her green suede jacket and took the package of gold flakes out.

"Young brat fighting for the same bit of ground as old Hitches," said the swanherd. With the back of his miniature hand he set the hanging shreds of his mustaches off his mouth. "One or other of the cobs put so much as a foot in the lake and they're off. Been up after

them twice this morning till now." He stood small as a child below her, looking up to her in weakness and for hope from under his twin shaggy brows. "Got a blow from Hitches this morning trying to get between them near took me off my feet," he said. "Bang down come Hitches with one wing thought a hammer'd struck me proper. Iron couldn't have done it better."

"I'll have a talk with them," said Lady Glourie, snapping her lighter open. The swanherd stood below her, in the water still, watching her underlip pushing up against the white paper of the cigarette and the little flame of the lighter perishing in the rain. All about them over the trees and the sea and the pastureland the rain was falling, endlessly falling. As if the island had not had enough of it all winter, the rain was going to keep on falling right on through the spring.

With the cigarette fast on her unpainted lip, Lady Glourie started back up the path again, and the swanherd lifted his feet from the muck lying deep on the roots of the *Zostera* weeds, drew them slowly from the separately heard kiss of the water and swamp, and followed her quickly towards the rhododendron trees. Just beyond the forest of leathery leaves on which the rain stood and the wire-run down which Lord Glourie and the others drove the wild ducks in season, the swanherd called to her and pointed out across the full water of the little artificial lake.

"There beyond's old Hitches," he said. Lady Glourie halted and looked, her head lifted, her eyes narrowed, the rain loading the dark green rim of her felt hat until it dropped in scallops around her short-nosed, long-lipped face.

"I'll just give him a piece of my mind," she said. She stood squinting against the cigarette smoke and the rain and the distance there still was between her and the white floating bird. He was close to the other shore, gyrating slowly on the surface of the lake, the imperious head lifted quick as the finger of a compass to sight or sound. "You there," Lady Glourie called out to the big bird across the water. She took the cigarette out of her mouth and held it down, shielded in her broad white ungloved hand. Behind the swan, sitting on the high throne of the nest, sat the bold-eyed pen, no longer young, who year after year had been his mate, his love, his freshly seduced bride. "You there," Lady Glourie called out again. "You, Hitches," and the swan's body curved the water as he turned, his

bright menacing eye fixed on her like a jewel, the supple neck arched, the webbed feet fanning just below the surface as he came. "If that's your end, then you can leave this end to the young ones, can't you?" Lady Glourie cried, and the woman sitting on the nest behind him looked in venom across the water at Lady Glourie and the swanherd, then stretched her powerful throat forth and spoke her husband's name.

On the other side of the little neck of water where the lake narrowed quickly into the stream, Lady Glourie saw the young couple now, pure white among the rushes, slender as young girls and working eagerly, hesitantly together, building their first nest higher, higher out of the fringe of *Ruppia* grasses.

"What harm are they doing you?" Lady Glourie called out to the old ones far at the other end. "What harm on earth?" The cigarette dropped from her hand and she looked quickly down at it and, thinking of this other thing, she ground its fire out.

All the way back along the path towards the swanherd's cottage these monuments to love the swans had built stood near them, some on the right hand and some to the left, and some unfinished yet and others with the serene white birds already enthroned on them. The path wound through the labyrinth of the swannery land, and there, close enough to be touched with the hand, rode the fiery-eyed young cobs on the swamp's water guarding their brides and their territory from the approach of man or one another. Here in this passionately mated life where bird cleaved violently to bird, the beetling old navigators followed the narrow veins of water through the reeds, slowly and arrogantly tracing the limits of their own domains in inexplicably savage perpetuation of the past. Here it was shared, as nothing else is, by the young and old alike, and for an instant Lady Glourie felt it moving, like a hand, across her heart.

Then the roof of the swanherd's cottage showed suddenly through the trees and Lady Glourie's face changed.

"I say, how's Mrs. Lucky today?" she said to the swanherd and they stopped just before the cottage.

"I can't say as there's been much of a change," he said. His faded uncertain eyes went from her face to the mucked toes of his rubber boots and took on the resolution of his grief. "She can't do much about getting on to her feet at all."

"I'll just pop in and have a look then," said Lady Glourie. She stood with her hands in her pockets, looking at the rain. "I've been thinking we'll have to write up to London for a woman-sort-of-thing to come down and help, give a hand for a fortnight . . . probably more trouble than they're worth. . . ."

On the morning of the eleventh of May she wrote to London for a trained nurse to come down, writing to Mrs. Wolf-Laxtern at the nursing home for someone who would not mind the country life so far from every kind of thing for a time.

"They're no cinema with in five miles," she wrote, scratching the words in a bold strong manlike hand across the paper. She could never remember the spelling of things or when the end of a sentence seemed likely to come along. If anything looked too wrong to the eye, she struck it out and began it again on the same line, farther on. "I wouldn't be bother with women down here atall if it wasn't for this that my swanherd got married last summer and his wife is not so young and not well atall and is expecting to be confined in a few weeks time any time atall really."

II

Even in May the fires must still be lit, and Lady Glourie wearing her tweed skirt and her cardigan and the heavy brogues a man might have worn stood eating her morning egg with one foot on the iron head of the fire-dog, watching the flame on the wood and spooning the yellow quickly out of the shell held in her hand.

"Says rain again, what?" she said, standing eating. She knew it was Glourie who came in through the double doors at the other end although she did not turn her head to see.

"Let it," said Glourie as he came across the room. "Let it, says I." He gave a little moan of weariness as he came up behind her and she felt his forehead rest for an instant, hard as stone, against her shoulder. "I've got a head like nobody ever had," he said, and Lady Glourie dropped the empty eggshell into the fire and wiped her fingers in her handkerchief. "A head, a head," he said, but even so there was the smell of the damp outdoors already on him. He came around before the fire, rubbing his lean, red-knuckled hands together, the cheekbones high and raw in his face and the darkish mustache clipped neatly the length of the naked-looking upper lip. *

It will be a good day on the river, he was saying to himself. The clouds will be low all day. It will be lively on the river. Every morning he would be out before breakfast on the drive to see which way the wind was moving and stand there on the gravel with the wet heavy air clinging to his face and his hair, smiling with pleasure, smiling into the mist and not seeking to peer through it. "I'll take the car and run up to Coppington-Fenwick," he said, scarcely seeing his wife before him for his own escape in the day. "Just pick up my rods and coat and a snack for lunch."

Lady Glourie stood with one foot on the firedog still, watching the flame along the log and thinking of the salmon, and Glourie said again: "I've got a head. There's nothing else to do with it. If I keep it out in the air all day, it'll clear of itself."

"And then you'll start in again tonight," said Lady Glourie. For a minute she thought of pulling her rubber boots on and going out with him without another word into the late wet morning's dark.

"No," said Glourie, rubbing his hands over. "Not tonight. There'll be no one coming in. I'll take one before dinner and that will be the end of it."

The sound of men, all day, all year without a break, the sound of men: a man serving at the table, a man in the kitchen, as if it were not only the wild cold countryside that drew men to it but as if all life itself and right to life were man's. At night, there it was: the sound of men talking and drinking in the downstairs halls, as if the house like the country around were too much the coarse hardy master ever to turn wooer and urge any but men to share the granite indifference to ease that struck to the marrow like the cold. Even in May the cold was there, like in September, but in the autumn it was the wild ducks instead of the salmon the men hungered for. At the stream end of the swans' lake had been fixed a corridor of poultry wire, open wide at the mouth so that the ducks who came down, drawn by the decoys, could be startled into it off the spread of quiet water. Concealed by the rhododendron trees, the hunters waited with the canvas bag held open at the one small outlet at the extremity of what seemed escape. There Glourie and his guests down for the weekend would wait for the wild ducks, fifty or more at a time, to drive into the wide deceptive mouth and down the tunnel of wire to the death that waited at the other end. Even from the house could be heard the tremendous wild beating

of the trapped ducks' wings, and the panic and compulsion of their advance. The men's voices could be heard shouting up from the lagoon, and the firing of their guns through the orchard and the pasture to the house. All day, month after month, the sound of living men, and at night when the men's voices were too loud, Lady Glourie got up from her bed and walked down the paved hallway to the brink of the uncarpeted stone stairs and from there called down to them, standing barefooted in her white nightdress.

"If the lot of you don't stop your row, I'll turn you out of the house," she would call down the stairs to them, and the stone of the stair pit and the arches sent back her voice with another sound to it, the way the voice of a choirboy singing in church is given a double, purer sound. Or if it were vacationtime and the children home, she called down: "Do you want to wake Mary and Ferris with your racket, Glourie? Now, call it a night and come up to bed."

There he stood at the bottom of the stairs, holding his glass in his hand and looking up at his wife in her nightdress with her reddish hair planted handsomely on her brow and cut short as a man's hair on her ears and neck.

"Better come down and we'll get another bottle up," he might say to her. His bright glazed intoxicated eyes would look up at her over the smile in his face as he stood there, a tall angular-boned man in hunting breeches, his lean shoulders rounded and stooping a little from his riding and his height.

When he had done speaking the men out of sight would burst into laughter, having ceased a moment as if in waiting for this cue. Up the stairs and through the hall would come the sound of their guffawing, and Glourie would turn his head to look back at them, his glass held up in his hand still, and she would see the side of his thin cheek and his mouth beginning to laugh.

"If you open another bottle, I swear I'll come down," Lady Glourie would call out and there would be nothing but laughter to answer, Glourie's guffawing and the guffawing of the other men like sound from the throats of a species that had since generations lost the power of speech and could only lift its voice now in this clamor that expressed neither pleasure nor derision, great howls of what could not be taken for jocosity giving vent to the soul's shyness and embarrassment.

"If the swans had quieted down I would've gone with you," ♥

said Lady Glourie with her foot on the firedog. Watching the fire she could see the cold belligerent eye of the great evil swan fixed on her, a bubble of tree sap or gum eyeing her beadlike from the burning wood. "Jo Lucky wants to put a wiring across the pond to keep old Hitches and the young couple apart, but I won't have it," she said. "Dividing the whole place up before we're done. I say let the cobs fight it out if they can't keep peace."

She knew Glourie was moving behind her towards the doors again, setting the newspaper straight on the table, putting his hands in his pockets and taking them out, listening and not listening, thinking, Now I'll get out through the door, the rods, Coppington-Fenwick, the salmon . . .

"There's Jo Lucky's wife too," she said, watching the licks of fire tremble along the wood. "Might want a woman around . . ."

"I thought you wrote for someone," said Glourie, clearing his throat at the door.

"I did. Yes. Three or four days back," said Lady Glourie.

"Righto," said Glourie. "I'll be getting on then."

III

When Lady Glourie walked up from the swannery and took the path over the downs she saw how many of the sheep, the great thick-coated ancient ones as well as the young, were limping with foot-plague as they grazed. The pastureland came to the edge of the cliffs and there halted; the short-cropped pasture grass that turned suddenly to white caustic earth, too friable for stone, dropped precipitously to the sea a quarter of a mile below. Before, behind, and to one side stood the half circle of the iron sea curving inflated to the skyline. On the one side as she climbed was the green wringing land and on the other the twilight darkness of the water rising unbroken to the twilight darkness of the morning heavens.

Because of the continued weather, foot rot was spreading faster than ever before among the flocks this spring. The crippled sheep and the lambs even were hobbling everywhere among the new thistles and the clumps of bramblebush and brier that marked with continents of dwarfed impenetrable jungle the open miles of green close-nibbled pastureland. Green, green, almost painful to the eye in its greenness was the grass underfoot, and then it stopped quickly,

without hesitation at the edge. Far below was the uneven coastline, broken by monstrous boulders that had crashed down in other years, or suddenly flowering with dark emerald islands mounted by oaks and tors in full luxuriant leaf and rocks on which the gulls stood thick.

It might have been a detached universe she saw below, visible as if static under glass. There was the far line of the shingles on which the seemingly motionless surf continuously broke, the white threadlike edge of foam as if painted there by hand; and the single gulls that might set out in flight, so rare, so farly seen that they were birds no longer but chalk-white splinters falling in retarded motion a long time towards the water's bleak gray becalmment. Climbing still, she came past the little semaphore, and she saw that with the spring a wash of new color had begun to rise in the dry sticks of the gorse that stood around it.

She began thinking about the nurse who was coming down from London to tend Mrs. Lucky, thinking quietly and securely of her. There might be times, in the afternoons maybe, when the nurse would have an hour to walk out with her over the country like this; they would be talking and not go as fast as she was going but stop and look down at the gulls, speaking about something else it might be, but looking down at the life and the languorous drifting half-movement of the birds and at the smugglers' black abandoned caves, blank as blind eyes in the cliff's face. Or it might be an older woman sent down to a place like this, too old and too unused for the climb. But even so they could walk along the lagoon together, on the flat, and she could talk about Mary and Ferris to her. I never thought I'd be able to have them off to school like this and live, but then it happens, you can bear anything, anything, and there you are . . .

Or if the old woman could put one foot before the other without doubling up, she'd get her as far as this. Why, Mrs. Gilfooley, or Miss Williams it might be, or Mrs. Kennedy, Ferris used to walk as far as this when he was five; I used to come up here with him three times in the week at least, ever since he could hold a gun. Or tell her Mary had never liked dolls for a minute, mind you, never once, never at any time. Or else the story of the day Glourie's farmer died of the injuries done him by the ram. It was right here, Miss Smith or Mrs. Penny, that old Mathone was killed by the ram in

tupping season. It was one afternoon when the sun was out for a change and old Mathone came up the way we've just been coming, walking with his dog, and the ram was making his choice with his blood on fire when the dog set on him without warning . . .

Or if the nurse were not young enough for this or to get this far, they'd stay where the ground was flat as your hand and damn the sucking wet. It might be there would be parcels of pain tied up in the old woman's legs from having stood thirty years too long by bedsides, piously running with bottles, pans, pots, on rubber-soled shoes down hospital halls. Now, you've seen a lot of life and a lot of different people, and what do you think of Ferris going off to school like that, making up his mind to it overnight? It isn't as if he were like every other boy you meet up with, but with Ferris there's something particular, something especially shy that makes you wonder how he gets on at all with anyone. Yes, yes, I'm sure, said Mrs. Gilfooley's voice to her as she climbed. In the first place, take his underwear now. He has no idea of the weather or whether it's cold in or out and which shirt or jacket. He's been writing home all the winter about a blazer. He wants a school blazer, mind you, and the matron writes me back the blazers are only for the summer term, something thin as cotton, it seems, and left to himself he'd wear the thing all year around. She could hear it, the cluck of the old trained nurse's tongue in her head. I thought he wouldn't be going to school until next year anyway, Miss Perry or Mrs. Appleby, so it really took me unawares. But you knew he had to go sometime; all boys go sometime, said the trained nurse with that maturing of kindness that becomes almost severity. Yes, I knew he had to go sometime, Lady Glourie said.

Why am I thinking like this about you, she suddenly asked the facelessness, the vacancy that was the nurse, the woman old or young or however she was, who might be at this instant packing her bag in London, putting her traveling shoes on, breathing hard in her corsets, middle-aged, as she tiptoes down an absolutely silent nursing-home hall. Why am I saying these things to you, said Lady Glourie shortly, and she fumbled her cigarettes out of her pocket and put one in her mouth. She stopped walking to put the lighter to the end of it and with her eyes half-closed the sense, if not the words, of explanation came abruptly, bitterly into her heart: Miss Smith, Miss Kennedy, Miss Forthright, there is nobody left, no one.

I have put flowers in your room seeking to disguise the look of it. If I change the flowers every day and keep on talking to you, perhaps I can keep it from you for a little while that there is nothing left here, that everyone here has died. If I take you out to see the swans and the sheep with foot rot you may not find out at once that everything has succumbed to the sound of glasses, bottles, guns, to the smell of stone and fish dying with hooks through their gills. I might even do one more thing, she did not say. I might look for the poems I wrote at school and say them to you. Poetry, mind you, poetry. Can you picture me sitting down and writing it, or if you were not too old we might be able to laugh out loud, uproariously, senselessly, stand shouting with laughter at something the way men scream with laughter together.

It was a gray day, the weather soft and drifting and wet, in which only the bright color of green survived. Lady Glourie had set out looking for the farmer and seeing him now kneeling beyond the gorse robbed the unarticulated speech suddenly and completely of its power. He was kneeling down in the wet grass with a lamb caught between his thighs, held fast there by the incapacitation of its spine and its four legs thrust out. He himself was young. He had been only five years with them, having come to them with his wife and child from near Dartmoor to take on the work when Glourie's farmer was killed by the ram. As soon as he saw her coming he lifted his head from what he was doing and spoke.

"There's more'n half of them lame with it," he said at once, and he smeared the salve deep into the heart of the hoof and pressed it down firmly with his thumb. "You can do and do but there had ought to be something made as holds better'n what we know."

"I was looking at some pictures in a magazine last night," Lady Glourie said, smoking her cigarette and watching what he did. "There's a kind of boot thing comes that they're showing up in London. It's a rubber casing, coming in several sizes, and you fit it right on fast over the hoof. I thought of getting some down here to have a try. What do you think? I thought I might get them if I do go up to town next week."

The young man stopped what he was doing and looked up at her, the knife he had been working with hanging loose now in his hand. He had no collar to his shirt and the neck of it was fastened neat and close with a separate collar button of bone and above it •

his brown strong neck swelled out, darker seeming because of the clean linen below it with the fine black stripe running through the stuff, the throat a little full in the front with great veins of life lashed to it. His face was lifted, rather pretty and narrow on the strong workman's neck, the chin cleft, the lips parted so that the teeth showed bright white between them, the eyes black, ardent and shining, fixed on her in sheer amazement.

"Look at that!" he said in a low voice of wonder. Two furrows from squinting a long time against rain and the blind misted sun stood just above his nose in that space where a few scattered black hairs almost drew his eyebrows into one. He spoke just above a whisper, as if the breath had left him for the moment in surprise.

"I'll be sure to be going up to see the children," Lady Glourie said. "It wouldn't do any harm to bring some back with me for a try." The farmer freed the lamb he held and they both watched it stumble and fall on its knees and lift itself and go, bleating and seeking to run, towards the sheep nibbling in concert, quietly, steadily, at the grass. The young man stood up now, sturdy and heavy on his feet, and tall but not as tall as she was. She could see the bits of gray that were coming in the strong thick locks of hair that sprang from his forehead. "Never can tell," she said, taking the packet of gold flakes out. "May be thingamabobs not worth the paper they're wrapped in. But if I go see the children . . ."

Thinking of the two separate things they went on, hardly knowing that they were going towards the sheep until the farmer suddenly leaned and caught one. With a jerk, like that of a subtle pugilist, he tossed the animal to its back before him and kneeled quickly and grasped it fast between his thighs. Lady Glourie stopped beside him and lit her cigarette, shielding the lighter's flame in her palm, and then she stood quiet, watching the knife's point work deeply into the soft black rot. With one hand the kneeling farmer held steady the yellowish woolen and wooden leg while the knife held in the other hand worked savagely, carefully, deep into the core of pain.

"I had a letter from Master Ferris this morning," Lady Glourie said, and the farmer said, "Yes, my Lady?" with a smile, scraping away at the hoof's rot still. "Pellet-shooting seems to be taking up more time than anything else as far as I can make out," she said, pulling hard at the cigarette. The farmer threw back his head and

laughed out loud and the sheep started and writhed with terror between his thighs.

"That's it, that's what I always says!" he said. "Best school in the country and—ha, ha, ha!" He settled his knife again in his hand and looked up at Lady Glourie, laughing. She knew what it was that Glourie did not like in him: the humility that was not there, the question in him of what was best and what was not nothing short of challenge when flung into a master's teeth. There had once been talk at the beginning when he and his wife and his child had first come; there had been some kind of story about him staying out all night, one story and then another but all of them agreeing that he did not drink and it was not that, but that he stayed out for someone else, one night for one woman and another night for another. Things had blown over and it was over and almost forgotten now, but when she saw these signs of arrogance and beauty in his face she remembered. She stood watching him, smoking, remembering, recognizing the youth and life in his hands and in the swelling of his neck as if the spring had enriched them again. She stood looking without womanly shyness because without womanly awareness at him as he worked, smoking and far too much the hard-bitten lady to acknowledge or believe in the stubborn power of his flesh, but experiencing the strange deep pang, or echo of it, that his wife must suffer seeing these things awaking in him, beginning again, endlessly rebeginning like the seasons' continual returning.

"How's Mrs. Panrandall?" she asked him in a moment. She watched him press the salve into the hoof, plug the hollow with cotton and lay hold of the foreleg of the sheep he held. At once the youthful, reckless look went out of his face and he said:

"Oh, she's keeping well, thank you, my Lady." His knife worked sharply at the rot, and then he began speaking of his daughter. "Violet's been having worms again," he said. "It's always like that this time o' year."

"There's a trained nurse coming down from London—for Jo Lucky's wife," said Lady Glourie. She spoke before she knew the words were coming into her mouth, but once she had spoken she felt the relief and the faint sense of excitement a lover feels when he has at last, after a long time of waiting, brought the loved name into a conversation of other things. Ah, Mrs. Gilfooley, Miss Williams, Mrs. Farlow, it is possible this is loneliness?

"Yes, I'd heard tell of that," said Panrandall. Lady Glourie stood holding fast to her cigarette and trying to say it quietly to him.

"I'm expecting her any day now, and she might as well have a look at Violet when she comes. She'd know exactly with her experience in nursing homes and hospitals." The name "trained nurse" had taken on a subtle meaning now, it was sweet with mystery, a name whispered tenderly across the dark. "It'll seem strange to me having another woman at the manor, y'know," said Lady Glourie. "Someone who knows about children like that . . ." She felt the smile on her own face, stretched foolish as a girl's grin. She ceased speaking because there seemed nothing more to say.

It was past four o'clock, just before time for tea, when Lady Glourie coming up from the swannery saw the old one-seated unwieldy car taking the curve of the drive around the beds. The fishing rods traveled the length of the near fender, the sensitive tips of them out quivering and jerking on the air ahead, and the flapping hood of the car was back like a cloak slipped from the shoulders of the two people who rode in it. They were seated high and seen so peculiarly distinctly: the man behind the wheel was Glourie with no hat on and the woman beside him was wearing a navy coat such as schoolgirls wear and a bright red beret. Because of the reckless sweep with which Glourie took the corner, Lady Glourie knew the woman riding beside him must be young.

IV

"Of course, there are other swans," Glourie was saying at the table, leaning back in his chair and eyeing the two women as he told them what they ought to know. "There's the Whopper or Hooper, the whistling swan. They come down from the north—Iceland, Scandinavia, Lapland. You can see them here in the autumn some days feeding with the others on their way migrating to Lower Egypt, stopping off here for a snack of *Zostera* and a bit of a powwow . . ."

It had been decided from the first that Miss Cafferty should take her meals with Lord and Lady Glourie at the house. She was to come up at the end of the morning after Mrs. Lucky was made comfortable and clean, eat at table with them, and then go back to

the swanherd's cottage in the afternoon. Then she would come up at dinnertime again, at half-past six or seven, for Miss Cafferty was not an ordinary girl; it was evident she came of good middle-class family and her father had been a scientist, in Dublin, but still a scientist, or so she said. If Lord and Lady Glourie had not wanted her there, there would have been no need to have her. They could not ask her to cook her own meals in Jo Lucky's cottage, seeing the rather superior girl she was, but they could have put her to eat in the servants' hall, not at table with the servants who all were males, but served before the others ate, and quite apart. However it came to be decided, there she was at the child's place at the table, sitting modestly between the two grown people, the parents, the master and mistress of the house. She wore a green silk dress that buttoned up to her throat, and her arms, bare from the elbow, rested round and white as a child's arms on the cloth. Her head, with the light hair parted in the middle, was turned in respect to Lord Glourie, harking as a child might docilely incline its head and listen to him, her fresh lips curved up a little, her guileless soft eyes resting on his narrow face in half-mocking, half-prestigious awe. The clear look she turned now and again to Lady Glourie held almost the same measure of respect, the same deferential, slightly amused look for the lady at the head of her own table struggling to slice the joint of cold mutton on the platter.

"You can hear them passing over at night some times," Lord Glourie was saying. "Certain times you can hear them whistling away as they go flying over the house."

"And over England," said Miss Cafferty quietly. "Over England to something else."

"Yes. Yes, of course," said Lord Glourie, taken aback. "Of course, over England."

He looked at Miss Cafferty a little uncertainly but there was no alteration or intent expressed in the sweet, oddly quiet, oddly childlike face which, despite her youth (she must have been twenty-six or twenty-seven at the most), could not logically and yet seemed to have survived even that long without losing any of its first innocent decorum, its first absolutely untouched guiltlessness.

"What would happen, do you suppose," said Miss Cafferty, moving her soft white arms as the servingman put her plate before her, "if one of the tame swans down on the lagoon decided to pair

off with a wild one who was just passing over? How do you think they'd fix it up?" she asked. "Do you think the wild one would give everything up and settle down here or would the poor old tame one have to hump itself and go on with the other?"

"Now, there's a question for you," said Glourie, and he looked towards his wife, laughing. Turning his head, he took the plate from the servingman's hands and set it down himself before him, quickly stabbing the meat with his fork. "Now, that's something to put to old Lucky, I must say. There may have been something like that come up in his father's time or his grandfather's time and there's maybe some record of it." He talked with the potato and meat in his mouth and his lean jaws grinding. "Now, that's a thing it would take someone like you to come along and put up to us, Miss Cafferty. I must say, it's a thing that would never come into my head if I lived to be a hundred."

"It's the corruption of the city, then, Lord Glourie," said Miss Cafferty gently. She gave a shy soft little laugh and her eyes shone mistily, almost tenderly, from one to the other of them. She glanced for an instant across the cloth for the Worcester Sauce and Lord Glourie's hand set it quickly down before her. "Thank you," she said in a low voice and she screwed the little stopper off with her pink-cushioned finger and thumb.

The farm horse was standing on the other side of the pasture fence as they came down the hill in the rain, a great thick horse with a wide back and shoulders plump as a woman's. His coat was tad and his mane and tail the color of unbleached linen; the same shane of hair but of another texture hung long at his fetlocks. He stood with his neck and head reaching over the top bar of the gate, watching the three people come down the grassy path among the apple trees growing on the hill.

"I managed to avoid him coming up," Miss Cafferty said. "I saw him at the other end of the field and I kept walking as fast as I could and tried to think of something else. I even think I said a prayer, just a little one, one big enough to keep him from turning around and seeing me."

She had stopped still for a moment, looking uneasily towards the fence and the horse on the other side of it at the bottom, and Lord Glourie stopped in front of her, below her on the hillside, and looked up at her face. Her yellow oilskin was buttoned to her neck and a

bandanna handkerchief, soaked dark with wet now, was knotted on her hair. Between the smooth skin of her forehead and the red bandanna there was a space, two inches perhaps, of light shining hair divided in the center and smoothed back and Lord Glourie stood below her smiling and watching the falling rain cling in it.

"What do you think he'd do if he did see you?" Lord Glourie asked, and Lady Glourie with her hands in her pockets and a cigarette on her lip said nothing but went on down the hill.

"He might trample me. Isn't that what horses do?" Miss Cafferty said, smiling dreamily at him. Lord Glourie gave a hoot of laughter.

"Trample!" he shouted. "Trample! Oh, that's wonderful! That's too good to be true! Do you really imagine—do you think for a moment—"

"I was quite brave coming up because he was way at the other end," Miss Cafferty said in her calm young voice. Their eyes came together and suddenly they both laughed. Lord Glourie with his jacket collar turned up to his ears and the brim of his hat pulled down stood grinning and roaring like a fool at her.

"Well, what are you going to do about it now?" he said in a minute. He could not take his eyes off her hair and the cluster of drops, like dew, fallen in it.

"I'll just follow Lady Glourie," Miss Cafferty said with decision. "Look, she's wonderful. She doesn't mind him in the slightest."

"I must say, you're behaving very well," said Lord Glourie. They were coming side by side now down the land. "You're coming through the cattle here without a word—"

"Ah, but it's different when you're here," said Miss Cafferty gently. "It's not the same as walking up alone."

One of the young black bulls, his brow pressed fast to another's was forced backwards across the path before them but Miss Cafferty did not falter.

"Perhaps it was the drink you had before lunch," said Lord Glourie with a grin, and Miss Cafferty answered:

"No. I've made up my mind to get used to them of myself now."

In the silence that might have been taken as rebuke to what he had thought and said, they watched the little bull, still battling

with his knobby ungrown horns, be forced backwards into an apple tree in blossom on the slope, and there the bigger bull tossed his insolent childish head and veered away. The small one stood swinging the black tassel of his tail, absorbed in looking at the people now. There was a short thick lighter fringe of hair as if cut straight across his forehead and from under it his eyes looked boldly at them.

"He likes you," said Lord Glourie and Miss Cafferty turned in surprise and looked quickly at him.

"Does he?" she said, as if truly pleased, astonished. "Does he, do you think?" She held out one hand towards the bull, her fingers rubbing softly together in a wooing gesture to the little animal planted motionless before them in the grass. "Come here, come, my darling, my baby, come," she said softly to him. His fresh naked nose seemed vulnerable as a living heart, arrogantly and timorously exposed before them. "Come, my darling," she murmured.

"I'll have to remember what you had," said Lord Glourie to cover his embarrassment. "A Gin and It, wasn't it? After a Gin and It taken before lunch, you're not afraid of bulls any more and you might even be persuaded to go through a field with a horse standing in it—"

A slight rush of wind struck the branches of the apple tree and a shower of unbroken drops scattered down from the leaves and fell on the young bull's broad obstinate brow. Lady Glourie had reached the gate below and lifted the bars down and out of some emotion speechless as failure she could not look back and recognize Miss Cafferty there coming down the hill, Miss Cafferty instead of all those other women, old or young, with varicose veins or with voices that never faltered, talking about the cases they had had: the Mrs. Michaelmases, the Miss Mitchells, the Mrs. Doghertys who were to come with ears to lend, with Cockney voices ready to confirm. This is the first year that Ferris, this is the first term that Mary hasn't written every week. This is the first time I've ever needed anyone, the first time in my life, Miss Weatherby . . .

The big horse on the other side was arching now with impatience, shaking his mane eagerly at her and stroking with one fore-foot the sodden earth. There he was, as she let the bars down,

chafing from one end to the other, waiting to shoulder her aside when the moment came and to canter free up the hill through the young cattle grazing underneath the trees.

"Look here, my lad," said Lady Glourie in a loud bold voice, "the other side of this fence is exactly like the side you're on . . ."

She stood in the opening where the horse sought to pass and when he seemed ready to rise above her and break across her like a wave, she lifted her hand and slapped his wet naked shoulder a crack with her open palm. They saw him veer on the points of his hoofs, the muscles tighten in the strong ballet-dancer legs, and then he cantered away, snorting, across the flowering mustard-yellow and pansy-faced field.

"Isn't Lady Glourie amazing?" Miss Cafferty said in a low wondering voice. They were almost down the hill now and she stopped to watch the horse spin and go. "Oh, if only I could do things like that . . ." Even Lord Glourie, or any man, Lady Glourie thought turning to look back at the nurse, must hear the repudiation the silence gave the passionately and deceptively uttered words, but Lord Glourie said: "Yes, she is, isn't she?"—responding not to the silence but to the words the nurse had said in the rapt voice of one who has not listened to the sense but only to the voice that spoke them. In a moment he might say: "I'm awfully afraid I didn't hear what you said, Miss Cafferty. I'm afraid I was thinking of something else . . ." And Miss Cafferty might turn her young, tender, un baffled eyes to his and answer: "Oh, it wasn't anything of any importance. I was just talking about Lady Glourie. I was just speaking of your wife. That's all."

"Come on," Lady Glourie called out, as if impatient. "Get the bars up again before he takes it into his head again to make a dash—"

"Righto," Glourie sang out. He came quickly along, up to her now on the other side of the fence, a necklace of raindrops sliding bead by bead along the knife-fine brim of his brown hat. "I'll take care of it," he said, looking back to see if Miss Cafferty was there. But Lady Glourie had lost her patience.

"Here you are, Miss Cafferty," she said. "Take up the bar once you're over and fetch it up where it belongs."

"Hold on a minute, I've got it," said Glourie, stooping, but

Lady Glourie had already put the long weathered pole of the fencing into the little nurse's hand. She saw the sudden fluttered look of deference in Miss Cafferty's eyes, the flickering across her eyes of humility or guilt or fear as she genuflected to take the crossbar up and lay it in its place. When they were all three on the same side of the fence Lady Glourie took the packet of cigarettes out, put one in her mouth and snapped her lighter open.

"There's just one word I wanted to say to you about Jo Lucky," she said. She started walking down the path through the meadow and they followed obediently, like children, watching her footmarks falling firm, regular, one by one on the mud and grass before them. "If anything happens to his wife," she was saying, "he'll never go after a new one. It took him forty-five years to make up his mind to it and once it's done he's through forever. He's been off his head for weeks about her now. Out the door he goes to look to the swans and then back to do for her as best he can. He's been doing that all alone, except for when I could get down there to help him."

Glourie gave a laugh and chewed with his lower teeth at his mustache.

"Doctor says something about her staying in bed," he said to Miss Cafferty's back. "Rigamarole about keeping her feet off the ground."

"And another thing," said Lady Glourie so sharply that Miss Cafferty started, "he's got to have a boy, y'see. If it's a girl, then the swannery's through for his family. It has to go on after him to somebody else. Y'see, it goes from father to son, from father to son. It's been four generations Lucky, but he isn't so young now, and he's an old man for his age, and if he hasn't a son this time then it's probably the last time."

Glourie burst into a guffaw behind them and Miss Cafferty half-turned to him, as she walked, and smiled.

"Seems to me you're asking an awful lot of Miss Cafferty," Glourie said.

"I'm not asking anything of her she can't do," said Lady Glourie without humor. "I'm telling her how things are here. If he don't have a boy it'll be the finish of him." The path broadened near the cottage and Lady Glourie waited, smoking, until the others caught her up. Then she said: "Those shoes, Miss Cafferty. You'll catch

your death in them. You ought to get something better for the country."

"I will, Lady Glourie," said Miss Cafferty humbly.

V

Miss Cafferty came on a Tuesday and it was a week later in the afternoon when Lady Glourie was standing up by the fire drinking her tea that she believed she saw where the fault lay. Lady Glourie put her cup quickly down for now she saw Miss Cafferty suddenly and piteously clear, touchingly and bitterly in need not only of money but of the other things to which no name came voluntarily: those effects which were a family's and a life's accumulation and which Miss Cafferty had none of. With the taste of jam in her mouth still she put on her jacket and her hat, scarcely waiting in her haste to seek out the packet of cigarettes, and then she set out under the rain for the swanherd's cottage. Whatever might have happened in time here, the thing went on quick, sure and unbewildered, whatever it might have been it would all have been my fault for I can see this place as nobody else here sees it. She believed she was seeing Miss Cafferty for the first time now, taking her by surprise as if she had never before clapped eye on her, and the sense of recognition grew stronger, louder like a tide rising to its fullest power. It was this, whether truly shaped by thought or enunciated vehemence, which took her in steady haste down through the orchard and the pastureland.

She saw it now as wilderness to which only the vaguest outline of order had been given, this place they gave a name like "home" to and what must seem nothing but dereliction after streets of tidy semidetached residences in the outskirts of London or of Dublin even; the whole restless malevolent estate abandoned to the willfulness of wind and rain and the sea birds' scavenging and to the willfulness of purely male desire. She was on the path to the swanherd's cottage, walking fast between the rounded pyramids of nest on which the swans sat lightly, their white bodies softly spread, their heads alert and upright in the rain; and still the process of minute recognition went on, object by object rising on the relentlessly rising tide on which the swans now floated and which swept Miss Cafferty on with this sudden and unforeseen vortex of com-

passion. Even me, a woman, too hard, too defiant, so that she came into this domain of locked, welded mates an outcast, to be kicked up and down the hill from one wedded couple to another, the Jo Luckys, the Panrandalls, the Glouries, the violently mated swans, and nothing but suspicion offered her. A poor little Irishwoman with nowhere to go but to other people's houses in other people's countries, a living to make with other people's clothes on her back, a green dress somebody handed down to her and pointed shoes too narrow for her feet with heels too high for the country she was in. Lady Glourie saw her for an instant gentle as a young lamb to be nursed in the heart and she knew the words to say at once to her. The cottage door was standing open and Lady Glourie took her cigarette from her mouth and ground it out under heel on the mossy ground.

"How's Mrs. Lucky doing?" Lady Glourie asked. The swanherd had come out of the cottage-dark to the threshold, wiping the tea from his mustaches.

"There's no change, my Lady," Jo Lucky said, "unless it might be she's stronger some from lying in bed and her mind more at peace like."

"So she likes Miss Cafferty, then, does she?" said Lady Glourie pleasantly and boldly.

"Oh, yes," said Jo Lucky, but saying it so quietly that he might have been saying nothing. Then he looked up and said: "Old Hitches near took the breast off the young cob this morning. Let it be the pen in the water and Hitches don't stir a feather, but soon as the cob comes down off the nest they're at it."

The young pen had laid her five olive-green eggs and when she left them to feed in the *Ruppia* grasses the cob would mount the nest and take her place, was what Jo Lucky was saying. Nothing had changed, not Mrs. Lucky's health, nor the warring on the lake where a wreath of fallen swan feathers floated on the water's black glass, drifting slowly towards the stream's mouth in the rain.

"I just wanted to speak a word or two with Miss Cafferty," Lady Glourie said, and Jo Lucky's face seemed suddenly to stop short, stopped absolutely as if he had drawn a curtain down across it, and he looked away towards the lagoon.

"I reckon she's out," he said. "She said something as she was going out for a bit of air like."

"Which way did she go?" asked Lady Glourie. The swanherd waited a moment, as if making a choice, perhaps between what was true and what he was going to say. Then he said, still looking towards the water:

"Hard to say."

Lady Glourie took the time to light another cigarette before setting off across the fields, not towards the house or the lagoon but in the direction of the cliffs, towards the path to the semaphore where the flocks grazed out and where the farm stood. For a week I've been thinking of the things I haven't said to you, Miss Cafferty, the tide ran on. I'm doing a sweater for Ferris now and I'm awfully clumsy always around the shoulders. I'm not good at getting the sleeves in and time and again it's come into my head to ask you if you've done very much knitting and if you could help me out. There's nothing at all to rolling up wool if there's a girl or even a boy in the house, but ask a man to hold it and where do you get? I thought perhaps in the evening after supper if I brought the wool out, because it's like talking to the wall to ask Lord Glourie . . . Miss Cafferty, I come to you in apology, I ask you not to do death to those imaginary figures the name "trained nurse" gave birth to . . . I ask you . . .

She had climbed faster than she knew and now Panrandall standing near the semaphore startled her out of it and she cleared her throat to speak.

"If you hadn't come up," he said, "I'd have been down this evening." He had lifted his cap from his head and they stood facing each other. It was a week since she had been up and now the gorse was beginning to bud brightly and tenderly about them. The sheep with their heads lowered to the wet herbage grazed slowly, step by limping step, away. "It's getting very bad now," he said. His mouth with the white teeth in it seemed charmed to her as she watched him speaking, charmed and damned with the great burden, the terrific gift of beauty he had to give. He hasn't the look of a man who stays home, there must be something still; even now there must be something going on. She thought of Mrs. Panrandall and the sister-pang of compassion struck her heart again and she said quickly:

"I know, I know. I'm sure I'll have to be going up to town about it. But just now it's not so easy. The swans are kicking up a row for"

one thing. And then I don't feel right going till Mrs. Lucky's time is over." (Is this true? Is there a word of the truth in it? Is it only because I'm afraid of leaving Glourie now?) "The nurse has come, y'know, a Miss Cafferty," she said in a natural, pleasant voice, saying the name out frankly. Panrandall lifted his hand and put his hair back from his forehead.

"Yes, my Lady," he said. "I know."

"I'll come up and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Panrandall tomorrow or Thursday," said Lady Glourie. They started down the land together, walking a little apart through the sound of the sheep's lips tearing strongly at the grasses.

"I'll tell her, Lady Glourie. She'll be ready for you," the farmer said. As they came to the path Lady Glourie's eyes fell suddenly on the footsteps: the perfectly preserved marks of a woman's narrow high-heeled shoe in which a foot had gone leisurely, elegantly down the hill. She halted, staring down at the footmarks in the wet clayey earth, and Panrandall stopped too beside her. There they both stood, not speaking, looking down.

"Now who would that be?" Lady Glourie said in a moment. Both thought and suspicion had gone instantaneously from her head in surprise.

"Well, that's funny," the farmer said in a low voice. They both stood quiet, reading the history of delicately, perfectly made prints. "It wouldn't be your own shoe, my Lady?"

Lady Glourie gave a snort of laughter.

"Take a look at my foot, Panrandall," she said. The farmer looked down at the long broad foot in its brogue that she lifted sideways for him to see and slowly shook his head.

"Perhaps someone from the manor," he said and with that Lady Glourie knew. Whether from the side of his face or the blood smiting strong in her own heart, she knew. She saw the color rise in his cheek and run dark and sullen underneath his skin.

"Well, that might be, of course," she said. "Yes, I'm quite sure it might."

Ah yes, she said, ah yes, and in a moment she went down the hill with her eyes fixed on the traces of it, walking quickly where this other woman had seemed to saunter down under the falling rain. Ah, yes, Miss Cafferty coming up here at night, every night perhaps, walking along slowly with an arm fast around her, this

was probably exactly how it was; and here further along near the stile where the steps paused and mingled, the man's with the woman's, here doubtless a mouth had suddenly ceased to speak, perhaps ceased laughing or singing, while a man's mouth that might be anyone's but must be Panrandall's had closed in passion on Miss Cafferty's thirsting mouth.

VI

When she had hung up her wet jacket and hat in the hall and put house shoes on she walked into the big room and found them. They were sitting in the inglenook and Glourie must have been reading or reading aloud for the book was open on his knees still. The chimney had been heaped with monstrous slabs of wood flung in a half a dozen deep with no thought of economy, whole logs that split with flame and fell disastrously as Lady Glourie crossed the room, like falling trees that tore their roots and hearts out as they crashed.

"We tried to make it warm enough to bring him back to life," Miss Cafferty said as she stood up in the glowing jagged shape of light. Lady Glourie had begun to comb her hair up from her ears, sharply, severely in her fingers, and she stood still this way with her big white hands spread looking at the sea gull Miss Cafferty held. "We found him blown down, wounded, on the shingles," Miss Cafferty said and Lady Glourie looked, wondering, at the sign of tears left on her face. "It doesn't seem to be his wings," Miss Cafferty went on. She was holding the bird in one bare arm against the green tidy dress that day after day emerged out of some immacutely kept if almost destitute wardrobe, the cool clinging green dress worn regardless or in defiance of the weather. "But still it died," she said.

"As soon as you found it?" Lady Glourie asked without sentiment, as a doctor or nurse might have said it. She had gone close enough to see how the feathers had begun to dry in yellowish pointed whisps that hardened upon its breast, and she ran one finger now along its lifeless throat.

"No, it was alive, it was able to flutter off when we found it," said Miss Cafferty. "We were taking a walk along the beach and

I saw it a little way ahead. I didn't think it was badly hurt. I thought I could easily save it."

"It died as soon as I gave it the whisky," said Lord Glourie with a low uneasy laugh. Both women looked at him a moment, at the face strangely contorted, twisted as if in pain, as he sat there laughing.

"Lord Glourie gave it a spoonful of whisky," said Miss Cafferty. Her face hung over the bird's dead body, the waxlike apples of her cheekbones just visible under her lowered lids. "And then it died at once," she said quietly. Lady Glourie stood like one enchanted, unable to move hand or foot, watching bewildered the tears slip from under Miss Cafferty's lashes and disappear down the pale flesh of her cheeks.

"I've been trying to relieve her mind with some statute, case, and customary law," said Lord Glourie, and Lady Glourie sat down on the other side of the inglenook knowing that she herself was not only not required to speak but not even to be present to look on. The pace had already been set from the beginning, like the rush of the favorite from the post who could only be watched romping home without effort and without rival. She sat quiet, watching Miss Cafferty across the firelight while Glourie read on again from where he had left off; watching Miss Cafferty not with envy or even dislike but with hopeless acknowledgment of that line which had from their first meal together been finally, unalterably drawn between spectator and those who ran. When she had looked a long time at Miss Cafferty, her eyes, like those of the other woman, fastened on the body of the dead white gull and remained there while Glourie's voice went on in what might have been uncomfortable imitation, half-jocular, half-tragic, of someone else's nonchalance. ". . . 'item where as well our said Sovereign Lord the King, as other Lords, Knights, Esquires, and other noble Men of this noble Realm of England, have been heretofore greatly stored of Marks and Games of Swans in divers Parts of this Realm, until of late that divers Keepers of Swans have bought or made to them Marks and Games in the Fens and Marshes and other Places and under Colour of the same, and of Surveying and Search for Swans and Cygnets for their Lords and Masters have stolen Cygnets and put upon them their own Mark, by which unlawful Means the

Substance of Swans be in the Hands and Possession of Yeomen and Husbandmen and other Persons of little Reputation.' " Lord Glourie cleared his throat and laughed at this while the two women on opposite sides of the fire looked unceasingly at the sea gull with its head fallen to one side of the green stuff of the nurse's dress. " 'Wherefore it is ordained that no Person of what Estate, Degree, or Consideration he be other than the Son of our Sovereign Lord the King from the feast of St. Michael next coming,' " Lord Glourie read on, " 'shall have or possess any such Mark of Game except he have Lands and Tenements of Estate of Freehold to the yearly Value of Five Marks above all yearly charges.' The penalty for breaking this law," said Lord Glourie, "was 'forfeiture of the swans, one moiety to the King and the other to any qualified person who made the seizure.' "

"They used to put the marks on the swans' bills," Lady Glourie said in spite of herself, but Miss Cafferty did not lift her head.

" 'It was resolved that all white swans not marked which had gained their natural liberty and were swimming in an open and common river might be seized to the King's use by his prerogative,' " Lord Glourie read out. " 'A man may prescribe to have a game of swans within his manor, as well as a warren or a park, and he who hath such a game of swans may prescribe that his swans may swim within the manor of another and that a swan may be an estray. In such case, the cygnets do belong to both owners in common equally, sic, to the owner of the cock and the owner of the hen and the cygnets shall be divided betwixt them. And the law thereof is founded on a reason of nature, for the cock swan is an emblem and representation of an affectionate and true husband to his wife . . . ' " Lord Glourie's voice muted slowly into silence and his hand turned the page. "This isn't such an interesting part of the treatise," he said, looking on ahead.

"Please," said Miss Cafferty in a scarcely audible voice. "Please read it all, Lord Glourie."

The color rose in Glourie's face but he turned back the page again and again began the mocking loud accompaniment to Miss Cafferty's silent implacable grief. The tears had begun to slip down her cheeks and fell singly and bitterly upon the lifeless bird.

" ' . . . for the cock swan holdeth himself to one female only,' " Glourie's voice read out sardonically, " 'and for this cause nature

hath conferred on him a gift beyond all others; that is, to die so joyfully that he sings sweetly as he dies . . .’ ”

“Of course, swans make mistakes, sometimes,” said Lady Glourie, speaking rapidly as if to save or hide them all from implication. “We’ve seen them, Glourie and me here. One autumn a couple of cobs paired off together, went through all the song and dance of meeting each other on the water and dipping their heads under, first one and then the other a dozen times or more the way they do, and then sank under the surface for the pairing. And in the spring, mind you,” said Lady Glourie, staring with inexplicable sorrow into the fire, “the two cobs took turns sitting on the empty nest they’d built together.”

Lord Glourie closed the book smartly and stood up and stretched before the flames, his legs long, narrow, the kneecaps delicate and prominent as teacups above the leather of his puttees.

“Oh, it isn’t only the cobs that make fools of themselves by a long shot!” he said in annoyance. “There were two pens made a sight of themselves one spring, last year I think it was, laying infertile eggs and sitting a month on them trying to hatch them out!”

“Jo Lucky said there was nothing for it but to introduce the two cobs to the pens,” said Lady Glourie, and Miss Cafferty looked up for the first time across the fire to her.

“Do you think that would have helped?” she said in a low passionate voice. “Do you think that would have changed anything at all?”

VII

Lord Glourie had a glass of whisky and soda in a minute and the ladies each a glass of sherry, and when they looked out of the windows now they saw that the rain had stopped. For the first time in the fortnight the clouds had drawn away and the sky was a faint but marvelous blue beyond the branches, perishable as the tinting of a robin’s egg it seemed and with the same fragile quality of an eggshell blown clean of any future purpose or life. Because of the drink, something festive became of the evening at once and they went in to supper with the sense of gaiety like a fourth person who had joined them there.

“Now I feel young again, I feel saved from old age,” said Miss

Cafferty, taking the same place at the table, the child's place between the two people of authority. "One little drink has saved me and the rain has stopped."

"Save me, then," said Lord Glourie, crossing his legs and laughing. "Look at the gray hairs I have. Whisky and soda doesn't change them."

"Ah, but you don't need to be saved," said Miss Cafferty. "Two people together don't starve, don't drown, don't flounder. It's only alone that one perishes. You're two people always, but I'm one person very quietly but very steadily getting old alone."

"Old!" exclaimed Lord Glourie, savagely uncrossing his legs.

"Last night I went to bed very late," Miss Cafferty said. She sat with her hands clasped on the cloth before her, her clear candid eyes watching Lady Glourie worrying the joint. "I was very dissipated," she said. "I couldn't bear to stay in the house, and black as it was after Lord Glourie walked me home, I went out on my own."

Lord Glourie put his fork down.

"You mean you went out by yourself?" he said.

"Yes," said Miss Cafferty. Her eyes were shining and her chin was lifted in defiance or triumph at him. "You see, when I was a child and after, when I was growing up at home, I used to go off walking like that at night alone. Sometimes I have to do it. I can't help it. Something happens inside me and I have to go." She helped herself from the platter of smoking greens the man held at her elbow. "Something happens and there's no help for it," she said in a cheerful voice. "It's like a bird that suddenly comes alive inside my head and starts beating and beating at the windows. I know what I have to do when it happens. There's no escape for it unless I go out and walk it off. So last night I didn't get to bed till almost dawn. There was nothing else for it. I went out and up along the cliffs, walking and walking like mad, I don't know where, way up past the lighthouse somewhere—"

"You were alone?" repeated Lord Glourie, scarcely aloud. He cleared his throat and he could not take his eyes from her face. "Were you by yourself?" he said.

"Yes, yes, of course. Why not alone?" said Miss Cafferty, smiling at him,

"Look, Glourie, they're passing the greens to you," said Lady Glourie. But it was as if he no longer cared who saw it nor how perfectly it might be seen.

"You walked up around the farm, I suppose," he said bitterly.

Miss Cafferty shrugged her shoulders and turned her attention to the food on her plate.

"I don't know," she said. "It was so dark I couldn't see anything. I just wanted to get out, don't you see, breathe the air, feel the wind on my face, the rain even, smell the sea. Doesn't it ever happen to you?" she said, and she turned in appeal to Lady Glourie. "Don't you feel that thing, that kind of desperation I mean, that desperation of the heart as well as of the flesh, and you must get out however late it is or whatever the weather's doing?" She looked at both their faces, waiting a minute, and then she said without shame: "I believe sometimes I'm damned, I'm cursed, perhaps by my country or by the blood in my veins, because no one else feels this, no one. I've never met anyone who has this madness. I'm no longer a human when this thing begins. There's no identity left to me, it's swept away on the torrent or by the devastating fire or whatever the thing is. I have to go out and walk all night, no matter if a gale is blowing—"

"Well, the weather's broken now," said Lady Glourie, cutting the slice of mutton on her plate. "If it'd gone on like this the sheep would've been done in and no mistake. Panrandall was sick at heart this afternoon when I saw him."

Glourie did not speak, did not stir, but sat there leaning back in his chair, his jaw set, his eyes fixed motionless on Miss Cafferty's face.

"Well, if you were up by the semaphore you must have seen the farm, Miss Cafferty," he said in the same low dry voice, taking it up where he had left off, as if no one had spoken.

"I assure you I saw nothing," said Miss Cafferty. "It was absolutely black. I saw nothing at all."

Lord Glourie waited before he spoke again, his eyes still fixed on her, preparing himself and his voice for what the answer might be. On the other side of the table Lady Glourie stirred as if she must rise from her place and save him from it. Don't speak, don't ask any more, don't try to know, Glourie. She knew the story as

well now as if it had been told her over and over again. Glourie, said her agitation across the table, don't ask it, don't say it. But there was no stopping him now, there was no way to halt him.

"Have you met up with the farmer?" he said. He did not smile but his whole being made the effort towards nonchalance, the terrific gesture toward lightness to detach those words from all his voice foreboded. "I suppose you must have run into Panrandall up there?" he said.

Miss Cafferty went on chewing her dinner and then she looked at him with her little up-turned smile.

"Met up with whom?" she said politely.

"With Panrandall." Lord Glourie's hand played with his fork on the cloth. He had not touched the food before him. "With the farmer," he said.

"Oh, the farmer!" said Miss Cafferty. "Perhaps he would be the man who brought the eggs to the cottage one morning?"

"What was he like?" asked Glourie, still making the bitter, the despairing effort towards ease. "What would you say he was like? How would you describe him?"

Miss Cafferty sat quite still, her eyes lowered, the little point of hair growing off golden from her white childish brow.

"I don't know that I could say exactly," she said while the two others watched her. "It's rather difficult to remember."

"Difficult to remember!" Glourie cried out. "How many days ago was it—three? Four?"

"I suppose it was something of that sort," said Miss Cafferty in a slow quiet voice. She looked at Lord Glourie, smiling in soft tantalizing surprise. "I can't say that I took much notice of him, really. I know I went down to the door when I heard someone knocking because Jo Lucky was out with the swans already. It was very early. He was there with a little basket of eggs, the farmer, Panrandall, as you call him. I think I asked him in for a cup of tea—"

"Oh, you did, did you?" exploded Lord Glourie. He shifted in anger in his chair and his thin fox-face pointed wildly and helplessly at her. "So you asked the farmer in for a cup of tea, did you?" he said.

"Yes, I did," said Miss Cafferty in her low musical voice. "And if you mean, Lord Glourie, that it was not the thing for me to do then I feel I cannot agree with you. You see, I believe we have very

different feelings about people. I'm sure we don't see things at all in the same way. I haven't the least bit of snobbishness in me, not an atom. I'd just as soon ask a farmer in to tea as the vicar." She looked at Lady Glourie with her softly defiant eye, playing so spiritedly the role of the proud Irish rebel at bay in their midst. Her eyes swept the lordly table and she said: "I wonder if it has occurred to you, Lord Glourie, that things are changing everywhere in the world and that you'll probably wake up one morning and find everything quite different. Some day that egg just won't be there for breakfast, and that will only be the beginning. There'll be much worse to follow. Everything is going to be so altered that you may have to learn a new language. The wars they're fighting now aren't just the same old wars, the same old tiresome story. It's that man, the man you think one should not sit down at table with, who's coming to be the most important person in the new arrangement. I can't see any place for your vicars in this new thing the world's coming to."

"Ho, ho," cried Lord Glourie, slapping his leg. "You talk like Dartington Hall, Miss Cafferty, I must say you do!" Suddenly he uncrossed his long legs and leaned forward in the candlelight with his eyes fixed, shining, on her face. "I'll take my oath on it Lady Glourie's sat down to table with more farmers than you ever have!" he said sharply.

"That's very easy," said Miss Cafferty quietly. "I've never sat down with any."

"Oh, you haven't?" said Lord Glourie. He leaned back in his chair again. "Then I take it Panrandall didn't step into the cottage with you after all?" he said.

"No," said Miss Cafferty, looking at him in gentle surprise. "I thought I said that. Mrs. Lucky called me from upstairs and that was the end of it."

"Mrs. Panrandall does our washing for us," said Lady Glourie deliberately. The pudding had been set down before her and she began helping it out in great steaming chunks. "I remember when they first came here to work for us and Panrandall was a stranger in the village. He couldn't go out but all the girls were making eyes at him along the road. Then it came out he was a married man and a father and that put a stop to that."

"There was some to-do about a chambermaid down at the

Clarence," Glourie said, spooning the pudding into his mouth. "I gave him what-for then, I can tell you. I wasn't going to have anything like that going on here on my place, and since then he's kept to the straight and narrow."

Lady Glourie thought for a moment then of speaking to Miss Cafferty about Violet's worms but when she looked at the gently guileless face she could not bring herself to speak. *She is not a trained nurse, she has nothing to do with nursing; she is a witch, she would only know how to charm them away.* But as if she had read her thoughts, Miss Cafferty began reciting in a clear derisive voice:

*When Hebrews lived on lizard pies
And fed their children worms and flies,
Who were God-fearing, kindly, wise?
The Dunns, O'Tools and Flanigans.*

"What's that?" asked Lord Glourie, bewildered. His head was flung up like a horse's, the white eyes cocked, the mouth ready to roar with laughter, no dignity, no annoyance even left, but only the sheer terrible sense of his deliverance because Panrandall had not gone into the cottage, because there was time yet, because Miss Cafferty was there, for the moment there before him, to be seen, to be listened to . . .

*Who cheered up Eve when things were dark,
Drew up the plans for Eden Park,
Helped Noah navigate the ark?
The Dunns, O'Tools and Flanigans.*

"That's a poem about the Irish, is it?" asked Lord Glourie in terrific delight, and Miss Cafferty laughed and nodded her head.

"Yes, it is," she said. "I recited it to the farmer the other day and that's how it came to my mind now. We had a little tiff about the Irish one afternoon but he brought me a bunch of violets to make up for it after."

Lord Glourie put his spoon down slowly and carefully on his plate while Miss Cafferty's voice went on:

*Who was it that invented war,
Whose praise is sung in ancient lore,
Who was the world created for?
The Dunns, O'Tools and Flanigans.*

VIII

After supper was done, Miss Cafferty told them she would go home alone. There was no dissuading her. She had never done it before but now her mind was set on walking down through the orchard and the pasture to the swanherd's cottage quite by herself, and she put her coat on saying it.

"I'm more at home in the country now," she said, "and besides the moon is coming through. It isn't as if it were one of these black stormy nights."

"I think you said at dinner you didn't mind the weather anyway, Miss Cafferty," Lord Glourie said, and then he turned his back on them both and walked into the sitting room and started the radio going. In his face as he went Lady Glourie saw the mark the truth had left, the stony stricken look of impotence and of despair. The thing was finished for him now, finished, finished. Through the thin sucking cheeks and the small flushed grinding jowls she could see it as he passed her: the look of the truth stuck fast in his crop, as bitter and terrible as gall.

"It'd be better if you didn't go alone, Miss Cafferty," Lady Glourie said. "I'm only too willing to go with you if you feel at all nervous in the dark."

She turned the big iron handle of the door, talking quietly to the nurse, and as she pulled the heavy door inwards the cool night air came strong and fresh into the hall, moved pure and clear, almost palpable between them.

"Ah," said Miss Cafferty softly, "there's nothing to fear, really, is there?" She stood small and girllike on the step, her coat buttoned up, her head uncovered. "You see how it is, Lady Glourie," she said. "I haven't anything of value that might be taken away from me, not a single thing anyone might want to take. Even my life isn't of any value, if someone wanted to take that, because of the stupid things I have to do with it."

There was no light outside, only the clear moon-flooded night without the house and the far little finger of the semaphore's ray from the cliff swinging, blue as glass, once, then twice, then three times across the unseen land and sea. Miss Cafferty lifted her face, as tender as a flower's, to look at Lady Glourie and then she stepped

at once into the moon-sculptured darkness, so small, so young, so childlike in the schoolgirl coat that something like misgiving smote Lady Glourie's heart before she closed and locked the manor door.

Lord Glourie sat in the cushioned armchair with his legs in the riding breeches stretched out before him, deliberately not listening for the door to close and the feet to sound out on the gravel. The fire was dying slowly and Lady Glourie came back into the room and picked up her knitting and sat down in the inglenook by the small perishing flames.

And "This is the National Program," the broadcaster's voice said. "There is one S.O.S. message tonight before the news summary." The casual cultivated voice spoke clearly but discreetly to them over the unseen waves of air, reaching from the long way out of civilization to them across the country's wilderness to this house made of stone massive enough to last forever. "There is a message for Barnes," said the perfectly articulated voice. "B-a-r-n-e-s. Will Alec R. Barnes, last heard of in Manchester three years ago—"

The voice did not falter in the grim stone-ribbed comfortless room but, resonant, impregnable, continued and Glourie got abruptly up from his chair and began walking the floor, pacing from one end to the other of the sitting room with his hands in the pockets of his breeches. He walked up and down in agitation while the voice of the broadcaster asked without pity or appeal that Alec R. Barnes, last heard of in Manchester three years ago, return to his wife Margaret Barnes, lying dangerously ill at the Middlesex Hospital. Lady Glourie's needles worked rapidly through the green wool of the sweater that would be for Ferris and as the fire trembled and gasped in death the joke began to take on its proportions. Wives calling out across the country at night, broadcasting their names and their addresses with their despair. She looked up from her work towards where Glourie walked wildly in his solitude between the two extremities of what confined him.

"Glourie, we might have a game of something. What about a game of 'Sorry' or 'Monopoly'?" she said.

But Glourie burst out:

"I'll have to get rid of that fellow if he's cutting up again!" His apoplectic face whirled towards her. "We've had enough trouble with him. I tell you, I'm fed up. He's got a wife, he's got a child. I swear I don't know what he's after."

"Who?" said Lady Glourie, looking blindly at her work. So it wasn't finished, so it might be only the beginning. Glourie stepped quickly to the radio and switched it suddenly into silence.

"Panrandall," he said shortly. He stood in the middle of the room doing the buttons of his jacket over his lean belly, and they did not look directly at each other. Between them, like a veil, was the substance of Miss Cafferty descending the hill alone, going without him but still accompanied it might be into the darkness of the trees, descending through the moonlight into what obscurity, into what depths of pollution. "Think I'll step out a minute for a breath of air," he said, and even when he crossed to where she sat and leaned over and put his thin lips against her cheek, they did not look into each other's faces. "I suppose you'll be going up to bed soon," he said, straightening up, and Lady Glourie answered:

"Yes, in a minute or two. I'll leave the front door unlocked."

After he had gone she sat for a while knitting the green wool in and out for Ferris, thinking of the shape of the sweater, up the back of it to where the sleeves would begin and the trouble there would be casting the shoulder on, and then the cold of the room or of her premonition began to gain inch by inch and minute by minute until it had outstripped her endurance and she could not sit quiet any more. She stood up and the chill ran down her spine. She thought of nights when she had gone to the head of the stairs in her night-dress in the winter and stood barefoot on the stone and called down to Glourie, but she had never before felt the cold as she now felt it. Even the words came back to her that she had called; but now their meaning was lost for they were words to be shouted out to and to be heard by men, not to be called in supplication after a woman. Because of the way the absolute male life had altered here she could no longer call his name as another man might call it into the darkness, shouting, "Now, come back, Glourie! Come up to bed before I go out there in the dark and get you!" She stood mutely rolling the length of the knitting up and thrusting the two needles slowly through the yarn, almost without thought or choice discarding the words that could no longer serve and which dropped voluntarily away as withered leaves will—seeking elsewhere, deeper, farther, beyond the forcing sense of cold and latency into what might be capacity not needed before, judgment that had not yet

been required to be. For this, as for everything else, there must be some sound that is not complaint to utter . . .

Lady Glourie had jumped out of bed and pulled her dressing gown on before the knocking on the door had quite stopped, and now as she went at a run down the sloping orchard the night air felt sudden as winter on her naked legs. She had not taken the time to pull any stockings on, but in the white nightdress and the woollen gown she went running a little ahead of Jo Lucky through the moon-bleached orchard.

"She was feeling queer all evening long," Jo Lucky was saying with his breath coming short. "But I kept thinking Miss Cafferty'd be in and I was afeard to put a foot out of the house and leave her there all to herself." He was coming along, laboring close behind her in his hobnailed boots. "I kept thinking Miss Cafferty'd be coming in—mind now," he said as Lady Glourie slid on her bedroom slippers in the mud.

"I'm all right," she said quickly. "Go on."

"But when it got on to twelve and she wasn't in yet I went out like I was telling you." He stopped talking to draw his breath in deep again and Lady Glourie said:

"Are you sure one of them's dead?" She felt her teeth beginning to chatter as she ran. On either side of the steep-dropping path the small apple trees stood shimmering, their leaves and blossoms done delicately in milky foil and the grass at their feet as white as if frost had fallen on it.

"It must be dead," said Lucky running behind her. "It wouldn't be lying still like that. I kept thinking it wouldn't be a minute before Miss Cafferty'd be in or I'd have been out there when I heard them starting. If it hadn't been for fear of leaving my missis alone there wouldn't of been no holding me. I was caught there between the two things." They had reached the cattlegate at the foot and Jo Lucky, with his wind crying in his throat, took down the top bar of it. "I was helpless as a child—"

"Let it go at that," said Lady Glourie when he laid hold of the second bar. She threw one long bare leg in the nightdress quickly over the poles and swung the other after. Now they were in the pasture fields and the meadow they waded through was lit by the moon wide and far around them, the grasses starred with dim flower faces stretching away pale and perishable with light. "I'll go straight

out to the lake," said Lady Glourie. She walked quickly before him with the tassels of her dressing gown's cord tapping lightly, rapidly at her knees. "You go in and put Mrs. Lucky's mind at rest and see if Miss Cafferty's there. You'll catch me up by the water."

Just inside the cottage gate their ways diverged and Lady Glourie took the path along the covered stream towards the lake. Here in the sudden darkness under the rhododendron trees the stream's water rang loud and musical among the stones, and Lady Glourie went quickly and silently over the wet, fresh, buoyant moss. At the end the shrubbery ceased and the oval of still water sprang without warning into being. It lay flat as metal between the black banks of earth, glassily, uncannily becalmed except for those instants when the breeze passed over it and combed the imperceptible current back to its untroubled heart.

At first there was just this to be seen and Lady Glourie paused a while in the gloom the trees cast and peered across the water. And then the shapes of the two swans began to emerge in the milky, deceptive light, the two enthroned birds sitting upright, pure and immobile as if hewn from marble and set at a distance from each other on their nests. The young bride was not far from Lady Glourie, seated white and still against the farther foliage, and the old pen could be seen beyond, across the whole length of the water, and with a flash of impatience Lady Glourie thought Jo Lucky had been mistaken. She followed the gradual curving of the lake, seeking guardedly under the bushes rooted in the sedge, watching steadfastly but almost without credence for what Jo Lucky said was there.

Five minutes must have passed before she heard the ripple of the water breaking, and she lifted her eyes towards it and saw the great unmistakable bird issue from the rivulet at the lake's head and ride slowly and supremely forward, his immaculate breast kissing the surface and pressing the reeds aside as he advanced. He did not ride into the open lake, but once freed of the thickest rushes he veered into the shallows. There he languidly came to anchor, and with the same profound, satiated languor opened first one and then the other of his wings. Lady Glourie stood motionless watching the ceremony of the bath begin.

He was just across the lake with the moon shining fully on him, and presently she began walking panther-swift and soft along the

path that led her to where he bent and dipped and shook under the lambent dripping veils of mingled water and light. Her eyes did not leave him; as if it was his own luminosity that drew her like a sleepwalker to him she moved seemingly stepless, seemingly mindless towards him. Now that she was near she could see the dark blotches on his pate and throat, staining the incredible purity as blood might have stained it, and she could see the feathers scattered like petals around on the metallic rings his ablutions flung quivering across the lake's perfect sheen. When she was almost behind him on the bank he was still unaware and he rose, treading water, and lifted the full reach of his pinions on high and threshed the beads of wet mightily from them. The great throbbing of his wings beat startlingly upon the silence, and as Lady Glourie watched she perceived someone else standing near, another woman standing among the densely flourishing, leather-leaved trees halfway, it might have been, between her and the bathing swan.

"Look, he's dead, he's dead over there," said the other woman in a whisper. She came towards Lady Glourie, moving silently across the moss until the white curve that was the face was there within hand's reach before her, and still the swan did not perceive them and did not falter in his dance. "Look at him, look," she said in a pained wild whisper, and Lady Glourie said scarcely aloud:

"What are you talking about, Miss Cafferty?"

"Oh, help him, help him," the nurse's voice implored, issuing strangely from that disembodied face which still retained the power of speech. Whatever else had been its corporeal being before was blotted out by the dark coat that buttoned to the chin and left the head detached but still articulate to drift towards Lady Glourie in invocation. "He's lying here, just over there, in the reeds. I saw it happen. I saw the old one get him and take the whole night killing him. I couldn't move. I just had to stand here like this and see it happen." The voice just missed the reach of sound for a moment, gasped and sank like the missing of the distantly heard motor of an airplane that is flying high and failing fast and has a long way to fall. Then she said with sudden breath: "I couldn't call anyone, I couldn't go. I just had to stay here, I must have been paralyzed, I had to see it happen." Her hand moved, seemingly without warmth or volition, into Lady Glourie's hand and quickly closed upon the fingers of it. "He's over there," she whispered, choking. "If you go

back up the path a little and then down into the water you'll see."

"Stay here while I go and fetch him out," Lady Glourie said. "Perhaps it isn't too late after all."

"Oh, yes, it's too late, it's too late," whispered Miss Cafferty, wildly. "And he didn't sing as he died so that's just another lie they tell you! He died horribly, horribly, screaming with pain and terror—" Lady Glourie felt the whole body shuddering, tremor after tremor shaking the nurse's flesh down to the extremity of her quaking hand. "I've been praying for you to come, I've been saying your name over and over," she said in anguish. "I've been saying you were to come, that you had to come . . ."

Lady Glourie slipped her hand out of Miss Cafferty's and turned and went up through the bushes again and the little Irish nurse came running after her as a child might have run. She could hear the sobs gasping and crying in Miss Cafferty's throat.

"Now don't cry," said Lady Glourie sternly and she kicked her bedroom slippers off onto the moss in the moonlight and stepped from the moss into the rushes. Step by step as she went the cold lake water rose from calf to knee from knee to thigh and as she walked her hands twisted the ends of the nightdress and the woolen dressing gown tighter and tighter, higher and higher from the water's touch until they formed a swollen tirelike shape around her buttocks. It was hard, wary going, the slogging advance forward through the mud: first one leg drawn strongly up out of the suck at the roots of the weeds and then the other pulled mightily from the thick shifting leeching cold. She had gone three yards or more before the big swan turned his head and saw her, and his neck arched swiftly in passion. He spun on the water, his wings slightly raised and spread, and rode towards her, hissing his venom from his poised snakelike head.

"Lady Glourie, Lady Glourie!" Miss Cafferty cried out in warning from the bank and Lady Glourie called savagely back:

"Don't worry, I know Hitches!" She strode fiercely on through the shining water, shouting at him: "Damn you, damn you, Hitches, you murderer, you killer!"

She had water to her waist now and she was walking swiftly, the undone twist of her night garments floating drenched behind her, the strong legs pulling their weight of water forward. She lifted each separate step and dragged it powerfully on until she perceived the floating body of the bridegroom. The dead young cob lay be-

tween her and Hitches, the neck drifting long and lifeless under water. She put out her hand to him and Hitches rose to his full height before her, the smell of his evil spit on the air, his wings and feathers busking. Just as he lifted his pinion above her arm to smite her, Lady Glourie seized the body of the bridegroom and took it swiftly to her breast.

She turned in the water and faced the land again, and as she went she felt the swan's fury rising like a wind behind her. With the dead swan's body held against her she fled before the passion of the living swan. As she swung to one side the tip of his wing swept from her shoulder down her arm and struck the water like a plank, and not only the strength but movement itself seemed to leave her and the figure of herself she saw as if it were another's, a woman knee-deep in slough like a statue capturing the attitude but not the motion of flight. She felt him gathering power again, heard the thunder of his presence behind her as he rose again to strike.

"Lady Glourie, my darling, my darling," Miss Cafferty's voice cried out, and Lady Glourie saw her coming through the water to her. She was still buttoned up in her schoolgirl coat deep in the icy liquid of the lake, reeling and staggering through the muck and the reeds towards her.

"Go back, go back!" shouted Lady Glourie, but Miss Cafferty came on through the water crying:

"If he touches you, I'll kill him, I'll kill him!" She had reached her now and flung herself on her. "Are you hurt, my darling, are you hurt?" she cried.

"Here now, take the bird and go as fast as you can with it," said Lady Glourie quickly. She put the limp feathered bridegroom in Miss Cafferty's arms and turned her back to land, and then she swung on Hitches. He was rising again on his tough legs from the surface of the water, his wings full like a ship's sails with the wind packed hard in them, and as the old bird towered on her Lady Glourie lifted her fist and brought it fiercely upon the side of his white rearing head. He paused a moment and swerved, but not in fear; it might have been stone striking stone for all it mattered to him. But Miss Cafferty had gained the bank again and in the moment the swan faltered, Lady Glourie climbed barelegged, dripping out of the reeds and up onto the land.

"He's dead," said Lady Glourie quietly and with the swan the two women moved off towards the trees.

He lay in Miss Cafferty's arms, the long neck hanging a soft white silken rope across the dark sleeve of her coat, the weight of the strong-billed head swinging it like a clock's dying pendulum, gently to and fro.

"I killed him," said Miss Cafferty in a whisper. "I couldn't go and get help. It was my fault. I couldn't move. I just had to stand and watch it happen. I couldn't go for you."

"Don't," said Lady Glourie. "It's no use thinking of all that. It's no good talking like that." She laid her open hand on the dead swan's breast and Miss Cafferty's tears fell on her fingers, warm and quick as blood falling from the heart.

"I couldn't sleep and I came out," Miss Cafferty was saying in a broken voice. "I came out thinking about you. Let me say it!" she cried in sudden passion. "Let me say it! I came out to think about you here alone where there might be something left of you somebody hadn't touched—some place you were in the daytime—some mark of you on the ground . . . I couldn't sleep in the room, I couldn't bear closing the door after I'd left you, just one more door closed between what you are and what I am! And then this, this," said the wild whisper, "this, this!" The enormous white bird lay shining against the schoolgirl coat. "There wasn't any need for this, there didn't have to be any death if I'd had the courage to call your name out!" The tears still falling down her face fell hot and violent on Lady Glourie's hand. "Night after night I've walked the country alone instead of walking it with you, talking out loud to you night and day, asking you to give me everything I haven't, peace and strength and that look in your eyes, asking you to give me a little bit of it to take away with me when I have to leave you, asking you for just one drop of it, one hint of what it is you have that I haven't got, that nobody else has, just one weapon to fight the others—"

"Hush, hush," said Lady Glourie, but she could not move away. For now the words seemed no longer Miss Cafferty's, or the voice Miss Cafferty's speaking, but these were things she had heard once or once imagined and had for a long time only dimly remembered, and this declaration was shape given them at last in the moving

and terrible statement of memory. "You mustn't speak like this," said Lady Glourie blankly, and her blank eyes looked straight before her, like a statue's. She stood waiting, scarcely breathing, waiting for the words to start again.

"Don't you think I see you as you are?" Miss Cafferty said passionately. "Don't you think I see you living in this place alone, alone the way you're alone in your bed at night, with butchers, murderers—men stalking every corner of the grounds by day and night? Don't you think I know? Don't you think I fought them all off because of you, because I knew that fighting them was taking your side against them?" There they stood back from the water in the darkness as any two women might stand on a street corner talking or in a still unlighted room and with the same lack of drama in their limbs and posture. The one with her head lowered was the only one who spoke now, speaking in hot broken fury as if directly to the dead swan who lay heavy in her arms. "Every night since I've come here I've walked out in the rain through the fields or up on the cliffs thinking of how I could tell you, or ever make you see your beauty, or how I could ever make you know . . ." Lady Glourie heard the voice stop again and with it her own hand ceased moving on the dead bird's breast and she stood bleakly waiting. The chill that she had not yet felt on her flesh entered her heart for the instant that the words abandoned this anonymous but exact description of love. "Every night I've asked everything of you," it began again at last, "asking you to escape from this, getting down on my knees to you asking you to lend me what you can spare, what you have left over, like the little piece of courage you lent me for a minute when I went into the water after you—"

They had not seen the yellow funnel of light that had been moving through the silver variegated shadows and the trees, but now it came clearer, closer, and they heard the men's voices speaking. Lord Glourie was walking just behind the swanherd and Jo Lucky was carrying the lighted lantern in one hand.

"Hallo, there," Lord Glourie suddenly called. "What's up?"

The voice that answered was Lady Glourie's, but strangely transported, strangely reverberant and high.

"The swans," she called back, "the swans," as if this were explanation. The two women did not move or speak again until the lantern's light fell first between them, like a barrier falling, and then

on them, as if someone had switched on the illumination in a room. Lady Glourie looked through the clear honey-yellow flood straight at the other woman's brow, at the lowered quivering lids, at the pale cheeks, and the mouth. There was no record, no sign, no history marked on them.

"You're wet, my God, you're drenched to the skin, the two of you!" said Lord Glourie in annoyance.

Lady Glourie looked down at the nightdress clinging to her own strange flesh and suddenly she began shaking with the cold.

BAD BOY FROM BROOKLYN

Michael Seide

THOUGH Louie Berk was dead for more than ten years, his brother, Sam, would still say sometimes that if Louie had lived, *he* would have really amounted to something because he had been by far the smartest one in the family. The romantic fact of Louie's early death (he was barely twelve when he died) had glazed his callow and wayward intelligence with the illusory sheen of genius. You can understand that. Just the same it is a bit queer to worry with such positive and posthumous praise a boy who has kept the peace for thousands of days in the same grave and who, for all we know, may have found truly sublime relatives to please. Besides, I often think it is ridiculous to speak hopefully of someone definitely dead because it is like having faith in the power of a devil to undo an angel's work. People talk so much of heaven and when someone finally gets there, they want to drag him back to earth and speculate on his chances of becoming a bloated millionaire or something brilliant on that order.

Louie had been a handsome kid, with a pure pale skin, gray mocking eyes, and an immortal cap he wore in style or out. He had been inconceivably inquisitive even for a boy of his age and, consequently, terribly fresh. I remember that last summer of his life when he almost drove me nuts, following Sammy and me wherever we went, stood or sat, an exasperating shadow, an inventive pest; and we had to drive him away a hundred times within the hour.

That driving-away business worries me a little even today. But it was something I did to Louie just before his death that really troubled me for a long time afterwards. But as soon as I learned to wrestle more glibly with cause and effect, whatever guilt I felt began to grow faint. And the flippant tone I put on as I talk about Louie can be attributed to a silly impulse to pay him off in his own coin .

now that he has become a sentimental memory rather than an accusing one.

A few months ago, just before Rosh Hashana, I went with the family to visit my father's grave at the Montefiore Cemetery in Springfield, Long Island. As it happens, Louie is buried there too and this time I decided to look him up. When we got to Montefiore, I went into the caretaker's office and asked the young lady there to tell me where I could find Louie Berk's grave. She asked me the year of his death and I told her approximately. While she was looking for Louie in the files, I looked her over. Through the tall Gothic windows I could see the gray silent shapes of monuments, above them the sky very blue and vacant, and everywhere the flurried shaking of leaves in the wind. No, she was not pretty. But she was sculptured in a very neat tailored style and looked so clean and smelled so fine: it was nice to find a young lady working in a cemetery. She handed me a slip of paper. Upon it was printed a map of Montefiore and neatly written in the proper spaces was Louie's name, the name of the society in whose plot he was buried (his father belonged to some branch of the Workmen's Circle), and the number of block, row, and grave. The young lady added her ample and sweet-smelling instructions and I said it would be a cinch, thanks very much.

But first, of course, we went to my father's grave. The mortality rate in his society had been terrific and it seemed there were more members under ground than on it. His grave-bed was very narrow and the faintly chiseled monument at its head was tilted a bit as though after a nocturnal spree. We had brought along a pair of gardener's shears and I clipped away at the clattering weeds until I had raised a beautiful blister. But the grave did look more presentable and we stood a while admiring its tipsy neatness. It was a fine clear day we had, with keen quivering sunshine and the cool wind of late summer. There were many miscellaneous birds around and the little nitwits screamed and chirruped and flitted and swooped happy as the day is long. I took out the slip of paper and went to look for Louie's grave.

But Louie was not where he was supposed to be. So I ignored the directions on the paper and began to hunt for him on my own. At first I stepped from one headstone to another with respect and tiptoe decorum. But as my search progressed unfavorably, I became

angry and very much less timid of the dead. The folks waited for me a while and, when they saw I had not found it yet, came over to help me. We climbed and trod many innocent graves of every age, shouted forgetfully to each other (my uncle cried out it was a perfect scandal), sweated, retreated, consulted, resumed, foraged through sand, gravel, and tangled grass, paused a moment each to decipher to the last fancy letter some intriguing monument, then became all increasingly angry for the kid just wasn't there. "Come on, for God's sake!" my sister finally said. "You'll look for him some other time!" I was ashamed to go back to the nice young lady in the office, so I said I would try once more and this time honeycombed a lot of territory. But Louie had literally vanished into the earth.

That kid was always hard to catch. I remember how I used to chase him after he had taunted me into scrambling pursuit. He would always run down the basement of the apartment house in which he lived and would quickly lose me in those pitch-dark labyrinths through which he could scuttle with his eyes shut. I would stand there baffled, yelling like a nut: "Come out, Louie, or I'll break your head! I'll break your head, Louie, if you don't come out!" It was strange how after ten years we seemed to be exactly in the same position.

But the futile search for his grave sent scuttling through my mind the simple and fluid details of Louie's last afternoon in the street. It was then it happened. Sammy and I (at fifteen a thousand years older than Louie) were on my stoop, talking with Rosie Bulbek (the darling! I wonder what's become of her fruity loveliness?) and Bessie Krohn. Louie pestered as usual. Girls always made him act very silly.

"Pull the chain!" he said, gently tugging at Bessie's blond rope of hair.

Bessie shook her head without turning around.

"Don't, Louie," she said.

A second later Louie tugged again.

"Pull the chain!" he chortled.

"Louie, please!" said Bessie.

A third time.

"Will you stop?" cried Bessie, pushing him down a step.

"Louie!" said Sammy. "Cut it out!"

Louie came up again and stood quietly a moment.

"Pull the chain!" he suddenly yelled, jerking sharply at that soft fascinating rope. Bessie screamed and clapped her hands to the back of her head. Louie scampered down the steps. Bessie watched him with blue astonished eyes.

"That kid brother of yours is certainly a nut!" she said to Sammy.

"Don't worry!" said Sammy. "You just wait until I get him alone!"

"Hey!" Rosie yelled at Louie. "Does your mother know you're out?"

Louie grinned: his mother certainly knew.

"You better not start up with him," said Sammy.

"Yes," advised Bessie loftily, "just ignore him!"

"Did you go to the movies Saturday?" I asked Rosie.

"Did you?" she said.

"I did," I said. "Did you?"

"I did too," she said.

Louie began to waltz himself around.

"O I did my dear did you did you!" he crooned, making excessive love to the air, then suddenly stopped and faced us. "Wow!" he howled, jumping up. "I'll say I did!"

"Louie!" cried Sammy.

Bessie stared blankly at Louie.

"I'll swear he's crazy!" she said.

"Whose little boy is that?" Rosie asked me as if she didn't know.

"Louie!" said Sammy. "I'm asking you in a nice way. Please go away!"

"Aw, no!" said Louie.

"Go away!"

"You ought to put a plaster over his mouth," said Bessie.

Sammy shook his head mournfully.

"That won't help," he said.

"Aw!" said Louie. "What am I doing anyways?"

"Go away!"

"Lemme stay, Sam, lemme stay," said Louie. "I won't do anything. I'll keep quiet. I promise."

"All right," said Sammy, sighing. "But remember!"

Louie sat down on the bottom step and looked out on the street.

"What did you see?" I asked Rosie.

"See?" she said.

"At the movies," I said.

"Oh!" she said. "*The Stranger at the Gate.*"

"Yeah?" I said. "How was it?"

"It was wonderful!" she said.

"Where did you go?"

"Loew's."

"Yeah?" I said. "You went there?"

Louie had turned and was looking up at us, leaning easily on his elbow.

"Uhuh!" he said.

We all looked down.

"What's the matter with him now?" asked Bessie.

"My, my!" said Louie, beginning to smile.

"Louie!" cried Sammy.

"Wow!" said Louie, ogling ecstatically. "What I see!"

Rosie suddenly screamed and hid behind me, tucking her skirt between her knees.

"Hey, dopey!" I said. "Are you sick or something?"

"You're sick yourself!" he said.

"Gee!" said Rosie. "He's a *bad* boy!"

"Why don't you stop bothering?" I said to Louie.

"Who's bothering you?" he said.

"You are!"

He grinned up at me.

"Why don't you stop playing with girls?" he said.

I walked down, pulled him to his feet and pushed him away.

"Go on!" I said. "Get the hell out of here!"

"Don't push!" he cried. "Don't push!"

"Come on, come on!" I said. "Nobody wants you around!"

"I'll stay here all I want!" he cried. "You don't own the street!"

I kept pushing him back and I could feel how stiff his chest was and it maddened me.

"Go away, Louie," I said, "or I'll smack you one!"

"Oh, yeah?" he said. "Yeah? You and who else?"

"Louie!" cried Sammy. "Please go away!"

"Me, myself, and I!" I said.

"Yeah?" said Louie. "Lemme see you! Lemme see you!"

He pushed his mocking little face into mine. Something in the

expression of his eyes made me lose my head. I brought up my right fist in an uppercut and clipped him hard on the side of the jaw. He staggered back, wobbled, but held his feet, his mouth opening wide in pain and astonishment. I stared at him amazed at what I had done. He put his hand to his face and felt it gingerly, then sat down on the step and began to cry, tenderly caressing his jaw. My legs felt funny as I walked up the steps.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Sammy. He was very pale.

"Aw, serves him right!" I said. "He had it coming to him for a long time!"

Sammy slowly shook his head, his eyes on the ground.

"You shouldn't have hit him so hard," he said.

"It's all right!" I said. "It'll teach him a good lesson!"

He went down the steps to Louie.

"Are you all right, Louie?" he asked, touching him gently.

Louie threw off his hand with a twist of his shoulders.

"Are you all right?" Sammy asked again.

"Lemme alone!" cried Louie. He got up and walked away, still holding his jaw.

Sammy watched him silently, then came up, shaking his head.

"You shouldn't have hit him," he said. "He's a sick kid."

"Sick?" I said. "What's the matter with him?"

Sammy tapped the left side of his chest significantly.

"His heart's not so good," he said.

"I didn't know that," I said. "Since when?"

"Since last year when he had the grippe."

"Gee, Sam," I said, "I didn't know that! I would never have hit him if I had known that!"

Sammy kept shaking his head and would not look at me.

"I'm sorry, Sam," I said. "I didn't know that."

He walked down without answering me and went home.

How was a guy to know? Sammy didn't have to get sore like that. I told Bessie and Rosie that, cross my heart I should hope to die if I lie, I didn't know Louie was a sick kid otherwise I would never have hit him. But all the sympathy seemed to be with Louie and I felt like a fool, so I gave up trying to explain and went upstairs.

I had never hit him before. Sometimes (when I could catch and hold that eel) I would just shake or push him a little and threaten to break his head if he did it again, but I never even slapped him.

I was very sorry that I had lost my head, but then, when I remembered how he had pestered the life out of me all summer, I was not so sorry. And anyways, I reasoned, it wouldn't kill him, a little tap like that, he had it coming to him, always sticking his nose into other people's business, just that kind of a kid you hate like poison. No, I said to myself, I'm not sorry, remembering his snotty face and that stiff maddening chest I had pushed. But I was sorry just the same and wished I hadn't clipped him.

The next morning I had forgotten all about it and when I saw Sammy with two empty milk bottles on his way to the grocery, I greeted him naturally.

"Hi, Sam!" I said, getting into step.

"Hello," he said.

I could tell at once by the way he answered me that he was still sore.

"Wanna go to Betsy Head for some basketball?" I said. "I'll blow my ball up?"

"I can't," he said.

"Why not?"

"Louie is sick."

"Oh!" I said, my heart doing a tumbletrick.

We walked along quietly until we came to the grocery.

"Listen, Sammy," I said, just as he was about to go in, "you know I didn't mean it. I'm sorry!"

"You shouldn't have hit him so hard," he said, watching himself bump the bottles.

"Aw, now, Sam," I said, "how was I to know?"

"He told my mother he fell," said Sammy. "He didn't sleep all night."

"I'm sorry," I said.

He looked up at me and suddenly smiled.

"That's all right," he said. "You didn't know."

I looked down in turn.

"So you can't go?" I said.

"No," he said, "I better hang around the house today."

"Okay, then," I said. "See you tonight."

He turned to go in.

"Listen, Sammy," I said, touching and detaining him, "tell

Louie for me I didn't mean to hit him so hard, will you? Tell him I'm sorry, eh?"

"Sure," said Sammy, "I'll tell him."

I thought everything would be as quickly forgotten as it had been forgiven. And that would have been the case if Louie had come down the next day, snotty as ever: but he did not. Instead, he kept to the house, obscurely ailing and, as Sammy told me, Louie just didn't feel right, nothing serious, but he couldn't eat or sleep well and Mrs. Berk thought it best that he keep inside a while, though she had not called the doctor because she hated to part with the two dollars she didn't have unless it was absolutely necessary, and then again, at first Louie didn't seem much different from usual. Anyway, Sammy is a funny kind of a guy and never says much, so I never knew just what was wrong with Louie or how he felt from day to day. But Louie's absence worried me. If I could only see him in the street and chase after him a bit or even call him a little stinker and tell him to scram, just once more, it would have made me feel so much better. And though Sammy never said anything about my hitting Louie, it seemed to me, as the days passed and Louie didn't show up, that with that one clip I had put him away permanently.

I did not go up to Sammy's house all this time, though before this, I could be found there at least once a day. I did not want to go up there and face Mrs. Berk, who was a nice woman and never seemed to get angry and who had always treated me swell. I suppose she suspected something. But I felt that Louie hated me and I could hardly blame him after what had happened, so I was glad when Sammy never asked me to come up to the house with him. I had a famous fight with Fishface Bloom and knocked out a couple of his teeth, but that didn't help much. I felt like destroying something or someone and took out a lot on my kid sister until my mother slapped me and that was something I could not easily forgive because I was no longer a baby to be slapped like that. Yet things seemed to be the same on the surface, and Sammy and I were good friends and became even better friends with Rosie and Bessie. That summer we were all deeply in love.

Then one evening after supper, Sammy came over to my house and said that Louie wanted to see me.

"Me?" I said, getting very red. "He wants to see *me*?"

"Yeah," said Sammy. "He said so."

"What about?"

"I don't know," he said. "He said you should come up."

"Come up now?" I said. "Right now?"

"Sure," he said.

"Okay," I said. "I'll go."

When we got to Sammy's house, Mrs. Berk, at the kitchen sink, smiled at me. Mr. Berk got up from the table.

"Hello, Mrs. Berk," I said.

"Hello, Joey."

"Hello, Mr. Berk."

"Hello, Joey," said Mr. Berk. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, Mr. Berk."

He came over, a short jovial man with a great halo of hair, and clapped me on the back: good old Joey!

"We haven't seen you for a long time," he said.

I looked down and did not answer.

"He's been very busy," smiled Mrs. Berk.

"How's Louie feeling?" I asked her.

She nodded her head quickly and pleasantly.

"He's all right," she said, "he's all right!"

"Come on," said Sammy.

Louie was propped up in bed, reading an *Argosy* magazine. He looked up as I came in and smiled at me very gently and very strangely. I could hardly recognize him. His face had become very broad and somewhat flatter, and there was a peculiar flabbiness about his yellow jaws. He wore a cap.

"Hello, Louie," I said. "How are you feeling?"

I walked over and took his outstretched hand.

"Hya, kid!" I said.

"I guess I'm all right."

Sammy went out.

"So you're feeling all right?" I said, still holding his hand.

He gave mine a slight reassuring squeeze.

"Sit down, Joey," he said.

I sat down close to the bed.

"Say!" I said. "You look fine!"

He eyed me quizzically.

"I really don't feel so good," he said. "I hate to stay in bed."

"Sure," I said. "I know how it is. It's lousy to stay in bed."

"Will you have some fruit?" he said. Then before I could answer:

"Ma! Mamma! Please bring Joey some fruit!"

"Aw, don't bother, Mrs. Berk!" I said. "I just had supper!"

"Bring some, Ma!"

The room smelled fuzzy from lack of air. On the dresser, beyond the bed, stood a half-empty bottle of medicine with a spoon alongside. Otherwise there was no sign that this was a sickroom. Louie was half covered with a blanket.

"Aren't you warm?" I said. "With that?"

He shook his head. He was not warm. He lay back and shut his eyes.

"Why didn't you come before?" he said.

"You know why," I said.

"You thought that I was sore?"

"Yeah."

"That was all right," he said. "I'm a fresh kid."

"You're not fresh."

"I am," he said. "I'm glad you socked me."

"No, Louie, that was wrong."

"It was a good thing," he said. "I deserved it."

He sounded like a very old and tired man.

"I'm sorry, Louie, I really am!" I said. "I would never have hit you if I had known!"

"It's all right," he said. "It was all my fault."

Mrs. Berk came in with a bowl of fruit. Louie opened his eyes and raised himself on his elbow. He smiled strangely at his mother and she returned his smile in the same strange way.

"Go ahead, Joey," said Louie, sinking back. "Have something. What'll you have? An apple? An orange? A banana? Have a banana."

I took a banana and began to peel it.

"Doesn't he look fine?" said Mrs. Berk.

"Sure," I said, munching, "he looks swell!"

She took off his cap, brushed back his hair, put the cap on again.

"He's a good boy!" she said. "An angel!"

She softly stroked his face, then began to adjust the bedclothes

about him while he kept following her with his eyes. I ate the banana and watched them smiling at each other. After a minute, I felt they had forgotten all about me.

"I guess you're tired," I said, standing up. "I better go."

No one said I should stay.

"Goodnight, Louie," I said. "I hope you feel better."

"Goodnight, Joey," he said. "Come up tomorrow and we'll play some checkers."

"I'll come tomorrow," I said. "Goodnight, Mrs. Berk."

"Goodnight, Joey," she said. "Come again."

"I will," I said. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

I did come the next day. But I never played checkers with Louie—for he died that same night. What is death? I asked myself that day ten years ago. I was only a kid. I said to myself, Louie is dead. What does that mean? I did not know how to answer myself. For that matter, what the hell do I know about it today? But death, I felt then, was not a person or even a thing. It was a vast and funny feeling that spread into, flooded and tinted the day. I told the day that Louie was dead and it returned me that feeling. Death was, also, an expression on a face: shock into terror into disbelief into awful sadness. Louie is dead, I told Rosie, and she returned me that expression. I had a special power that day. I went around with a phrase. Hey, Fishface! Did you hear? Louie is dead. The expression writhed again. I told my mother and she looked at me in the same terrible way. But then she became a bit noisy and disordered and I did not like that. I liked the tail-end of that expression: the resignation, the dignity even in a kid, the dense melancholy that no amount of summer sunshine could brighten. That's strange. I said I like it. And was thinking then of death. I must have been crazy.

They buried Louie so early the next morning that I missed the funeral altogether. When I came downstairs and found out it was all over, I felt very bad. I went back upstairs and lay down on the unmade bed and tried to sleep. I lay that way all morning and my mother kept coming in and out the room, but said nothing. Late in the afternoon, we had a big thunderstorm, and when it was over, I went downstairs and hung around the corner hoping maybe Sammy would come down. It was getting dark when I saw him come slowly down the steps.

I went to meet him.

"Hello, Sammy," I said, and my voice trembled.

He passed me silently. I walked after him.

"Where you going?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders: he didn't know and he didn't care. I caught up with him and fell into step. His eyes were red and swollen and he looked haggard and I felt something sting my chest and I looked away. Soon he began to cry very quietly to himself. His hands were stuck in his pockets and he let the fat warm tears trickle unheeded down his freckled nose. I put my arm across his shoulders.

"Louie!" he sobbed. "Louie!"

I gripped him tighter, turning my face away.

"He was only a kid!" he cried.

"Sammy, please!"

"Only a little kid!"

"Sammy!"

"I know! I know!" he cried. "Everybody thought he was a snotty kid! They were always chasing him and calling him names! The damn fools!" He turned to me. "You didn't know him like I did, Joey," he said in a changed voice. "He wasn't a fresh kid. He was smart. He was never fresh in the house. My mother liked him better than me. Honest, she did! Do you know what she used to call him? Angel!" He looked away and cried out bitterly: "And in the street they called him a bad boy! Bad boy! He was the best one, Joey, the best one of the whole bunch!"

He straightened proudly: the best one!

I removed my arm from his shoulders.

He blew his nose and wiped his eyes angrily: the best one of the whole goddamn bunch!

Pride covered over his grief and he grew quiet. It was dark now and we walked haphazardly for about an hour until we began to feel tired, so we sat down on some lumber stacked near the curb on Powell Street. We faced the gutter, gratefully resting under the yellow glare of the street light. The rain had flooded the sewer on the opposite corner and the one near us was hungrily drinking in a stream of dark dirty water. It was interesting to watch how smoothly and brightly the water moved. But after a while, I began to feel restless. We had often played poker with automobile license plates

and, as I sat there watching the cars pass, I began to play the game with myself.

“Look at that,” I said, pointing. “There goes a full house!”

But Sammy did not look up. He raised his head slightly and spat into the stream, then sadly watched the pure white flower of his spit as it floated out of sight down the sewer.

“CRUEL AND BARBAROUS TREATMENT”

Mary McCarthy

SHE COULD not bear to hurt her husband. She impressed this on the Young Man, on her confidantes, and finally on her husband himself. The thought of Telling Him actually made her heart turn over in a sudden and sickening way, she said. This was true, and yet she knew that being a potential divorcee was deeply pleasurable in somewhat the same way that being an engaged girl had been. In both cases, there was at first a subterranean courtship, whose significance it was necessary to conceal from outside observers. The concealment of the original, premarital courtship had, however, been a mere superstitious gesture, briefly sustained. It had also been, on the whole, a private secretiveness, not a partnership of silence. One put one's family and one's friends off the track because one was still afraid that the affair might not come out right, might not lead in a clean, direct line to the altar. To confess one's aspirations might be, in the end, to publicize one's failure. Once a solid understanding had been reached, there followed a short intermission of ritual bashfulness, in which both parties awkwardly participated, and then came the Announcement.

But with the extramarital courtship, the deception was prolonged where it had been ephemeral, necessary where it had been frivolous, conspiratorial where it had been lonely. It was, in short, serious where it had been dilettantish. That it was accompanied by feelings of guilt, by sharp and genuine revulsions, only complicated and deepened its delights, by abrading the sensibilities, and by imposing a sense of outlawry and consequent mutual dependence upon the lovers. But what this interlude of deception gave her, above all, she recognized, was an opportunity, unparalleled in her experience,

for exercising feelings of superiority over others. For her husband she had, she believed, only sympathy and compunction. She got no fun, she told the Young Man, out of putting horns on her darling's head, and never for a moment, she said, did he appear to her as the comic figure of the cuckolded husband that one saw on the stage. (The Young Man assured her that his own sentiments were equally delicate, that for the wronged man he felt the most profound respect, tinged with consideration.) It was as if by the mere act of betraying her husband, she had adequately bested him; it was supererogatory for her to gloat, and, if she gloated at all, it was over her fine restraint in not-gloating, over the integrity of her moral sense, which allowed her to preserve even while engaged in sinfulness the acute realization of sin and shame. Her overt superiority feelings she reserved for her friends. Lunches, and teas, which had been time killers, matters of routine, now became perilous and dramatic adventures. The Young Man's name was a bright, highly explosive ball which she bounced casually back and forth in these feminine tête-à-têtes. She would discuss him in his status of friend of the family, speculate on what girls he might have, attack him or defend him, anatomize him, keeping her eyes clear and impersonal, her voice empty of special emphasis, her manner humorously detached. *While all the time . . . !*

Three times a week or oftener, at lunch or tea, she would let herself tremble thus on the exquisite edge of self-betrayal, involving her companions in a momentous game whose rules and whose risks only she herself knew. The Public Appearances were even more satisfactory. To meet at a friend's house by design and to register surprise, to strike just the right note of young-matronly affection at cocktail parties, to treat him formally as "my escort" at the theater during intermissions—these were triumphs of stage management, more difficult of execution, more nerve-racking than the lunches and teas, because *two* actors were involved. His overardent glance must be hastily deflected; his too-self-conscious reading of his lines must be entered in the debit side of her ledger of love, in anticipation of an indulgent accounting in private.

The imperfections of his performance were, indeed, pleasing to her. Not, she thought, because his impetuosities, his gaucheries, demonstrated the sincerity of his passion for her, nor because they proved him a new hand at this game of intrigue, but rather because

the high finish of her own acting showed off well in comparison. "I should have gone on the stage," she could tell him gaily, "or been a diplomat's wife or an international spy," while he would admiringly agree. Actually, she doubted whether she could ever have been an actress, acknowledging that she found it more amusing and more gratifying to play herself than to interpret any character conceived by a dramatist. In these private theatricals it was her own many-faceted nature that she put on exhibit, and the audience, in this case unfortunately limited to two, could applaud both her skill of projection and intrinsic variety. Furthermore, this was a play in which the *donnée* was real, and the penalty for a missed cue or an inopportune entrance was, at first anyway, unthinkable.

She loved him, she knew, for being a bad actor, for his docility in accepting her tender, mock-impatient instruction. Those superiority feelings were fattening not only on the gullibility of her friends, but also on the comic flaws of her lover's character, and on the vulnerability of her lover's position. In this particular hive she was undoubtedly queen bee.

The Public Appearances were not exclusively duets. They sometimes took the form of a trio. On these occasions the studied and benevolent carefulness which she always showed for her husband's feelings served a double purpose. She would affect a conspicuous domesticity, an affectionate conjugal demonstrativeness, would sprinkle her conversation with "Darlings," and punctuate it with pats and squeezes till her husband would visibly expand and her lover plainly and painfully shrink. For the Young Man no retaliation was possible. These endearments of hers were sanctioned by law, usage, and habit; they belonged to her role of wife and could not be condemned or paralleled by a young man who was himself unmarried. They were clear provocations, but they could not be called so, and the Young Man preferred not to speak of them. *But she knew.* . . . Though she was aware of the sadistic intention of these displays, she was not ashamed of them, as she was sometimes twistingly ashamed of the hurt she was preparing to inflict on her husband. Partly she felt that they were punishments which the Young Man richly deserved for the wrong he was doing her husband, and that she herself in contriving them was acting, quite fittingly, both as judge and accused. Partly, too, she believed herself justified in playing the fond wife, whatever the damage to her

lover's ego, because, in a sense, she actually was a fond wife. She *did* have these feelings, she insisted, whether she was exploiting them or not.

Eventually, however, her reluctance to wound her husband and her solicitude for his pride were overcome by an inner conviction that her love affair must move on to its next preordained stage. The possibilities of subterranean courtship had been exhausted; it was time for the Announcement. She and the Young Man began to tell each other in a rather breathless and literary style that the Situation Was Impossible, and Things Couldn't Go On This Way Any Longer. The ostensible meaning of these flurried laments was that, under present conditions, they were not seeing enough of each other, that their hours together were too short and their periods of separation too dismal, that the whole business of deception had become morally distasteful to them. Perhaps the Young Man really believed these things; she did not. For the first time, she saw that the virtue of marriage as an institution lay in its public character. Private cohabitation, long continued, was, she concluded, a bore. Whatever the coziness of isolation, the warm delights of having a secret, a love affair finally reached the point where it needed the glare of publicity to revive the interest of its protagonists. Hence, she thought, the engagement parties, the showers, the big church weddings, the presents, the receptions. These were simply socially approved devices by which the lovers got themselves talked about. The gossip-value of a divorce and remarriage was obviously far greater than the gossip-value of a mere engagement, and she was now ready, indeed hungry, to hear What People Would Say.

The lunches, the teas, the Public Appearances were getting a little flat. It was not, in the end, enough to be a Woman With A Secret, if to one's friends one appeared to be a woman without a secret. The bliss of having a secret required, in short, the consummation of telling it, and she looked forward to the My-dear-I-had-no-idea's, the I-thought-you-and-Bill-were-so-happy-together's, the How-did-you-keep-it-so-dark's with which her intimates would greet her announcement. The audience of two no longer sufficed her; she required a larger stage. She tried it first, a little nervously, on two or three of her closest friends, swearing them to secrecy. "Bill must hear it first from me," she declared. "It would be too terrible for his pride if he found out afterwards that the whole town knew •

it before he did. So you mustn't tell, even later on, that I told you about this today. I felt I had to talk to someone." After these lunches she would hurry to a phone booth to give the Young Man the gist of the conversation, just as a reporter, sent to cover a fire, telephones in to the city desk. "She certainly was surprised," she could always say with a little gush of triumph. "But she thinks it's fine." *But did they actually?* She could not be sure. Was it possible that she sensed in these luncheon companions, her dearest friends, a certain reserve, a certain unexpressed judgment?

It was a pity, she reflected, that she was so sensitive to public opinion. "I couldn't really love a man," she murmured to herself once, "if everybody didn't think he was wonderful." Everyone seemed to like the Young Man, of course. *But still.* . . . She was getting panicky, she thought. Surely it was only common sense that nobody is admired by everybody. And even if a man were universally despised, would there not be a kind of defiant nobility in loving him in the teeth of the whole world? There would, certainly, but it was a type of heroism that she would scarcely be called upon to practice, for the Young Man was popular, he was invited everywhere, he danced well, his manners were ingratiating, he kept up intellectually. But was he not perhaps *too* amiable, *too* accommodating? Was it for this that her friends seemed silently to criticize him?

At this time a touch of acidity entered into her relations with the Young Man. Her indulgent scoldings had an edge to them now, and it grew increasingly difficult for her to keep her make-believe impatience from becoming real. She would look for dark spots in his character and drill away at them as relentlessly as a dentist at a cavity. A compulsive didacticism possessed her: no truism of his, no cliché, no ineffectual joke could pass the rigidity of her censorship. And, hard as she tried to maintain the character of charming schoolmistress, the Young Man, she saw, was taking alarm. She suspected that, frightened and puzzled, he contemplated flight. She found herself watching him with scientific interest, speculating as to what course he would take, and she was relieved but faintly disappointed when it became clear that he ascribed her sharpness to the tension of the situation and had decided to stick it out.

The moment had come for her to tell her husband. By this single, cathartic act, she would, she believed, rid herself of the doubts and

anxieties that beset her. If her husband were to impugn the Young Man's character, she could answer his accusations and at the same time discount them as arising from jealousy. From her husband, at least, she might expect the favor of an open attack to which she could respond with the prepared defense that she carried, unspoken, about with her. Further, she had an intense, childlike curiosity as to How Her Husband Would Take It, a curiosity which she disguised for decency's sake as justifiable apprehension. The confidences already imparted to her friends seemed like pale dress rehearsals of the supreme confidence she was about to make. Perhaps it was toward this moment that the whole affair had been tending, for this moment that the whole affair had been designed. This would be the ultimate testing of her husband's love, its final, rounded, quintessential expression. Never, she thought, when you live with a man do you feel the full force of his love. It is gradually rationed out to you in an impure state, compounded with all the other elements of daily existence, so that you are hardly sensible of receiving it. There is no single point at which it is concentrated; it spreads out into the past and the future until it appears as a nearly imperceptible film over the surface of your life. Only face to face with its own annihilation could it show itself wholly, and, once shown, drop into the category of completed experiences.

She was not disappointed. She told him at breakfast in a fashionable restaurant, because, she said, he would be better able to control his feelings in public. When he called at once for the check, she had a spasm of alarm lest in an access of brutality or grief he leave her there alone, conspicuous, and, as it were, unfulfilled. But they walked out of the restaurant together and through the streets, hand in hand, tears streaming, "unchecked," she whispered to herself, down their faces. Later they were in the Park, by an artificial lake, watching the ducks swim. The sun was very bright, and she felt a kind of superb pathos in the careful and irrelevant attention they gave to the pastoral scene. This was, she knew, the most profound, the most subtle, the most idyllic experience of her life. All the strings of her nature were, at last, vibrant. She was both doer and sufferer: she inflicted pain and participated in it. And she was, at the same time, physician, for, as she was the weapon that dealt the wound, she was also the balm that could assuage it. Only she could know the hurt that engrossed him, and it was to her that he

turned for the sympathy she had ready for him. Finally, though she offered him his discharge slip with one hand, with the other she beckoned him to approach. She was wooing him all over again, but wooing him to a deeper attachment than he had previously experienced, to an unconditional surrender. She was demanding his total understanding of her, his compassion, and his forgiveness. When at last he answered her repeated and agonized I-love-you's by grasping her hand more tightly and saying gently, "I know," she saw that she had won him over. She had drawn him into a truly mystical union. Their marriage was complete.

Afterwards everything was more prosaic. The Young Man had to be telephoned and summoned to a conference *à trois*, a conference, she said, of civilized, intelligent people. The Young Man was a little awkward, even dropped a tear or two, which embarrassed everyone else, but what after all, she thought, could you expect? He was in a difficult position; his was a thankless part. With her husband behaving so well, indeed, so gallantly, the Young Man could not fail to look a trifle inadequate. The Young Man would have preferred it, of course, if her husband had made a scene, had bullied or threatened her, so that he himself might have acted the chivalrous protector. She, however, did not hold her husband's heroic courtesy against him: in some way, it reflected credit on herself. The Young Man, apparently, was expecting to Carry Her Off, but this she would not allow. "It would be too heartless," she whispered when they were alone for a moment. "We must all go somewhere together."

So the three went out for a drink, and she watched with a sort of desperation her husband's growing abstraction, the more and more perfunctory attention he accorded the conversation she was so bravely sustaining. "He is bored," she thought. "He is going to leave." The prospect of being left alone with the Young Man seemed suddenly unendurable. If her husband were to go now, he would take with him the third dimension that had given the affair depth, and abandon her to a flat and vulgar love scene. Terrified, she wondered whether she had not already prolonged the drama beyond its natural limits, whether the confession in the restaurant and the absolution in the Park had not rounded off the artistic whole, whether the sequel of divorce and remarriage would not, in fact, constitute an anticlimax. Already she sensed that behind her hus-

band's good manners an ironical attitude toward herself had sprung up. Was it possible that he had believed that they would return from the Park and all would continue as before? It was conceivable that her protestations of love had been misleading, and that his enormous tenderness toward her had been based, not on the idea that he was giving her up, but rather on the idea that he was taking her back—with no questions asked. If that were the case, the telephone call, the conference, and the excursion had in his eyes been a monstrous *gaffe*, a breach of sensibility and good taste, for which he would never forgive her. She blushed violently. Looking at him again, she thought he was watching her with an expression which declared: I have found you out: now I know what you are like. For the first time, she felt him utterly alienated.

When he left them she experienced the letdown she had feared but also a kind of relief. She told herself that it was as well that he had cut himself off from her: it made her decision simpler. There was now nothing for her to do but to push the love affair to its conclusion, whatever that might be, and this was probably what she most deeply desired. Had the poignant intimacy of the Park persisted, she might have been tempted to drop the adventure she had begun and return to her routine. But that was, looked at coldly, unthinkable. For if the adventure would seem a little flat after the scene in the Park, the resumption of her marriage would seem even flatter. If the drama of the triangle had been amputated by her confession, the curtain had been brought down with a smack on the drama of wedlock.

And, as it turned out, the drama of the triangle was not quite ended by the superficial rupture of her marriage. Though she had left her husband's apartment and been offered shelter by a confidante, it was still necessary for her to see him every day. There were clothes to be packed, and possessions to be divided, love letters to be reread and mementoes to be wept over in common. There were occasional passionate, unconsummated embraces; there were endearments and promises. And though her husband's irony remained, it was frequently vulnerable. It was not, as she had at first thought, an armor against her, but merely a sword, out of *Tristan and Isolde*, which lay permanently between them and enforced discretion.

They met often, also, at the houses of friends, for, as she said, "What can I do? I know it's not tactful, but we all know the same

people. You can't expect me to give up my friends." These Public Appearances were heightened in interest by the fact that these audiences, unlike the earlier ones, had, as it were, purchased librettos, and were in full possession of the intricacies of the plot. She preferred, she decided, the evening parties to the cocktail parties, for there she could dance alternately with her lover and her husband to the accompaniment of subdued gasps on the part of the bystanders.

This interlude was at the same time festive and heartrending: her only dull moments were the evenings she spent alone with the Young Man. Unfortunately, the Post-Announcement period was only too plainly an interlude and its very nature demanded that it be followed by something else. She could not preserve her anomalous status indefinitely. It was not decent and, besides, people would be bored. From the point of view of one's friends, it was all very well to entertain a Triangle as a novelty; to cope with it as a permanent problem was a different matter. Once they had all three gotten drunk, and there was a scene, and, though everyone talked about it afterwards, her friends were, she thought, a little colder, a little more critical. People began to ask her when she was going to Reno. Furthermore, she noticed that her husband was getting a slight edge in popularity over the Young Man. It was natural, of course, that everyone should feel sorry for him, and be especially nice. *But yet. . . .*

When she learned from her husband that he was receiving invitations from members of her own circle, invitations in which she and the Young Man were unaccountably not included, she went at once to the station and bought her ticket. Her good-by to her husband, which she had privately allocated to her last hours in town, took place prematurely, two days before she was to leave. He was rushing off to what she inwardly feared was a Gay Weekend in the country; he had only a few minutes; he wished her a pleasant trip; and he would write, of course. His highball was drained while her glass still stood half full; he sat forward nervously on his chair; and she knew herself to be acting the Ancient Mariner, but her dignity would not allow her to hurry. She hoped that he would miss his train for her, but he did not. He left her sitting in the bar, and that night the Young Man could not, as he put it, do a thing with her. There was nowhere, absolutely nowhere, she said passionately, that

she wanted to go, nobody she wanted to see, nothing she wanted to do. "You need a drink," he said with the air of a diagnostician. "A drink," she answered bitterly. "I'm sick of the drinks we've been having. Gin, whisky, rum, what else is there?" He took her into a bar, and she cried, but he bought her a fancy mixed drink, something called a Ramos gin fizz, and she was a little appeased because she had never had one before. Then some friends came in, and they all had another drink together, and she felt better. "There," said the Young Man, on the way home, "don't I know what's good for you? Don't I know how to handle you?" "Yes," she answered in her most humble and feminine tones, but she knew that they had suddenly dropped into a new pattern, that they were no longer the cynosure of a social group, but merely another young couple with an evening to pass, another young couple looking desperately for entertainment, wondering whether to call on a married couple or to drop in somewhere for a drink. This time the Young Man's prescription had worked, but it was pure luck that they had chanced to meet someone they knew. A second or a third time they would scan the faces of the other drinkers in vain, would order a second drink and surreptitiously watch the door, and finally go out alone, with a quite detectable air of being unwanted.

When, a day and a half later, the Young Man came late to take her to the train, and they had to run down the platform to catch it, she found him all at once detestable. He would ride to 125th Street with her, he declared in a burst of gallantry, but she was angry all the way because she was afraid there would be trouble with the conductor. At 125th Street, he stood on the platform blowing kisses to her and shouting something that she could not hear through the glass. She made a gesture of repugnance, but, seeing him flinch, seeing him weak and charming and incompetent, she brought her hand reluctantly to her lips and blew a kiss back. The other passengers were watching, she was aware, and though their looks were doting and not derisive, she felt herself to be humiliated and somehow vulgarized. When the train began to move, and the Young Man began to run down the platform after it, still blowing kisses and shouting alternately, she got up, turned sharply away from the window and walked back to the club car. There she sat down and ordered a whisky and soda.

There were a number of men in the car, who looked up in unison

as she gave her order, but, observing that they were all the middle-aged, small-business-men who "belonged" as inevitably to the club car as the white-coated porter and the leather-bound *Saturday Evening Post*, she paid them no heed. She was now suddenly overcome by a sense of depression and loss that was unprecedented for being in no way dramatic or pleasurable. In the last half hour she had seen clearly that she would never marry the Young Man, and she found herself looking into an insubstantial future with no signpost to guide her. Almost all women, she thought, when they are girls never believe that they will get married. The terror of spinsterhood hangs over them from adolescence on. Even if they are popular they think that no one really interesting will want them enough to marry them. Even if they get engaged they are afraid that something will go wrong, something will intervene. When they do get married it seems to them a sort of miracle, and, after they have been married for a time, though in retrospect the whole process looks perfectly natural and inevitable, they retain a certain unarticulated pride in the wonder they have performed. Finally, however, the terror of spinsterhood has been so thoroughly exorcised that they forget ever having been haunted by it, and it is at this stage that they contemplate divorce. "How could I have forgotten?" she said to herself and began to wonder what she would do.

She could take an apartment by herself in the Village. She would meet new people. She would entertain. But, she thought, if I have people in for cocktails, there will always come the moment when they have to leave, and I will be alone and have to pretend to have another engagement in order to save embarrassment. If I have them to dinner, it will be the same thing, but at least I will not have to pretend to have an engagement. I shall give dinners. Then, she thought, there will be the cocktail parties, and, if I go alone, I shall always stay a little too late, hoping that a young man or even a party of people will ask me to dinner. And if I fail, if no one asks me, I shall have the ignominy of walking out alone, trying to look as if I had somewhere to go. Then there will be the evenings at home with a good book when there will be no reason at all for going to bed, and I shall perhaps sit up all night. And the mornings when there will be no point in getting up, and I shall perhaps stay in bed till dinnertime. There will be the dinners in tearooms with other unmarried women, tearooms because women alone look conspicuous

and forlorn in good restaurants. And then, she thought, I shall get older.

She would never, she reflected angrily, have taken this step, had she felt that she was burning her bridges behind her. She would never have left one man unless she had had another to take his place. But the Young Man, she now saw, was merely a sort of mirage which she had allowed herself to mistake for an oasis. "If the Man," she muttered, "did not exist, the Moment would create him." This was what had happened to her. She had made herself the victim of an imposture. But, she argued, with an access of cheerfulness, if this were true, if out of the need of a second, a new, husband she had conjured up the figure of one, she had possibly been impelled by unconscious forces to behave more intelligently than appearances would indicate. She was perhaps acting out in a sort of hypnotic trance a ritual whose meaning had not yet been revealed to her, a ritual which required that, first of all, the Husband be eliminated from the cast of characters. Conceivably, she was designed for the role of *femme fatale*, and for such a personage considerations of safety, provisions against loneliness and old age, were not only philistine but irrelevant. She might marry a second, a third, a fourth time, or she might never marry again. But, in any case, for the thrifty bourgeois love-insurance, with its daily payments of patience, forbearance, and resignation, she was no longer eligible. She would be, she told herself delightedly, a bad risk.

She was, or soon would be, a Young Divorcee, and the term still carried glamor. Her divorce decree would be a passport conferring on her the status of citizeness of the world. She felt gratitude toward the Young Man for having unwittingly effected her transit into a new life. She looked about her at the other passengers. Later she would talk to them. They would ask, of course, where she was bound for; that was the regulation opening move of train conversations. But it was a delicate question what her reply should be. To say "Reno" straight out would be vulgar; it would smack of confidences too cheaply given. Yet to lie, to say "San Francisco" for instance, would be to cheat herself, to minimize her importance, to mislead her interlocutor into believing her an ordinary traveler with a commonplace destination. There must be some middle course which would give information without appearing to do so, which

would hint at a *vie galante* yet indicate a barrier of impeccable reserve. It would probably be best, she decided, to say "West" at first, with an air of vagueness and hesitation. Then, when pressed, she might go so far as to say "Nevada." But no farther.

PETRIFIED MAN

Eudora Welty

“REACH in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder in it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher, honey,” said Leota to her ten o’clock shampoo-and-set customer. “I don’t like no perfumed cigarettes.”

Mrs. Fletcher gladly reached over to the lavender shelf under the lavender-framed mirror, shook a hair net loose from the clasp of the patent-leather bag, and slapped her hand down quickly on a powder puff which burst out when the purse was opened.

“Why, look at the peanuts, Leota!” said Mrs. Fletcher in her marveling voice.

“Honey, them goobers has been in my purse a week if they’s been in it a day. Mrs. Pike bought them peanuts.”

“Who’s Mrs. Pike?” asked Mrs. Fletcher, settling back. Hidden in this pretty den of curling fluid and henna packs, separated by a lavender swingdoor from the other customers, who were being gratified in other booths, she could give her curiosity its freedom. She looked expectantly at the black part in Leota’s yellow curls as she bent to light the cigarette.

“Mrs. Pike is a lady from New Orleans,” said Leota, puffing, and pressing into Mrs. Fletcher’s scalp with strong red-nailed fingers. “A friend, not a customer. You see, like maybe I told you last time, me and Fred and Sal and Joe all had us a fuss, so Sal and Joe up and moved out, and we didn’t open our mouths, only rented out their room, see. So we rented it to Mrs. Pike. And Mr. Pike.” She flicked an ash into the basket of dirty towels. “Mrs. Pike is a-very decided blond. *She* brought me the peanuts.”

“She must be cute,” said Mrs. Fletcher.

“Honey, cute ain’t the word for what she is. I’m tellin’ you, Mrs. Pike is attractive. She has her a good time. She’s got sharp eyes, Mrs. Pike has.”

She dashed the comb through the air, and a cloud of Mrs. Fletcher's hennaed hair floated out of its lavender teeth like a small storm cloud.

"Hair fallin'."

"Aw, Leota!"

"Uh-huh, commencin' to fall out a blue streak," murmured Leota, combing again.

"Is it any dandruff in it?" Mrs. Fletcher was frowning, her hair-line eyebrows diving down toward her nose and her wrinkled beady-lashed eyelids batting with concentration.

"Nope."

"Bet it was that last perm'nent you gave me did it," Mrs. Fletcher said cruelly.

"Naw, honey, couldn't be that," said Leota with finality.

"Bound to be somethin'," persisted Mrs. Fletcher. "I couldn'ta caught a thing like that from Mr. Fletcher, could I?"

"Well," Leota answered at last. "You know what I heard in here yestiddy: one of Thelma's ladies was settin' over yonda in Thelma's booth gittin'a perm'nent, and I don't mean to insist or insinuate or anything, Mrs. Fletcher, but Thelma's lady just happ'med to throw out that you was p-r-e-g—, and lots of times that'll make your hair do awful funny, fall out and God knows what all. It just ain't our fault, is the way I look at it."

There was a little pause. The women stared at each other in the mirror.

"Who was it?" demanded Mrs. Fletcher grimly.

"Honey, I really couldn't say," said Leota. "Not that you look it."

"Where's Thelma, I'll ask her," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Now honey, I wouldn't go and git mad over a little thing like that," said Leota, combing hastily, as though to hold Mrs. Fletcher down by the hair. "Nobody'd ever know it. I'm sure it was somebody didn't mean no harm in the world."

But Mrs. Fletcher shrieked for Thelma.

"Thelma honey, throw your mind back to yestiddy if you kin," said Leota, drenching Mrs. Fletcher's hair with thick fluid and catching the overflow in a cold wet towel at her neck.

"Well, I got my lady half wound for a spiral," said Thelma doubtfully.

"This won't take but a minute," said Leota. "Just cast your mind back and try to remember who your lady was yestiddy who happ'med to mention that my customer was pregnant, that's all."

Thelma drooped her blood-red lips dolefully and combed her platinum hair with a pocket comb. "Why, honey, I ain't got the faintest," she breathed, looking over Mrs. Fletcher's head into the mirror. "I really don't recollect the faintest. But I'm sure she meant no harm."

"Was it that Mrs. Hutchinson?" Mrs. Fletcher was tensely polite.

"Mrs. Hutchinson? Oh, Mrs. Hutchinson." Thelma batted her eyes. "Naw, dear, she come on Thursday and she didn't even mention your name. I doubt if she even knows you're pregnant."

"Thelma!" cried Leota stanchly.

"All I know is, whoever it is'll be sorry some day! Why, I just barely knew it myself!" cried Mrs. Fletcher. "Just let her wait."

"Why? What're you gonna do to her?"

It was a child's voice, and the women looked down. A little boy was making tents with water-wave combs on the floor under the sink.

"Billy Boy, hon, mustn't bother nice ladies," smiled Leota. She turned again to her customer and behind her back waved Thelma out of the booth. "Ain't Billy Boy a sight? Only three years old, and already just nuts about the beauty-parlor business."

"I haven't seen him here before," said Mrs. Fletcher, still unmollified.

"He ain't been here before, that's how come," said Leota. "He belongs to Mrs. Pike. She got her a job but it was Ward's third floor millinery. He oughtn't to wear those ladies' hats, they come down over his eyes like I don't know what. They just looks ridiculous, that's what, an' a course he's gonna put 'em on; they didn't like him hangin' around there. Here, he couldn't hurt a thing."

"Well! I don't like children that much," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well!" said Leota moodily.

"Well, I'm almost tempted not to have this one," said Mrs. Fletcher. "That Mrs. Hutchinson! Just looks straight through you when she sees you on the street, an' then spits at you behind your back."

"Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn't have it now," said Leota. "After goin' this far."

Mrs. Fletcher sat up straight. "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me."

"He can't?" Leota winked at herself in the mirror.

"No siree, he can't. If he so much as raises his voice against me he knows good and well I'll have one of my sick headaches. They're awful. And if I really look so pregnant already—"

"Well, now, honey, I just want you to know—I habn't told any of my ladies and I ain't goin' to tell 'em, evem about your hair fallin' out. What they don't know don't hurt nobody, as Mrs. Pike says."

"Did you tell Mrs. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher sulkily.

"Well, Mrs. Fletcher, look, you ain't ever goin' to lay eyes on Mrs. Pike or her lay eyes on you, so what diffunce does it make in the long run?"

"I knew it!" Mrs. Fletcher deliberately nodded her head so as to destroy a ringlet Leota was working on behind her ear. "Mrs. Pike!"

Leota sighed. "I reckon I might as well tell you. It wasn't any more Thelma's lady told me you was pregnant than a bat."

"Not Mrs. Hutchinson?"

"Naw. It was Mrs. Pike."

"Mrs. Pike!" Mrs. Fletcher could only sputter, although curling fluid was rolling into her ear. "How could Mrs. Pike possibly know I was pregnant when she doesn't even know me? The nerve of some people."

"Well, here's how it was. Sunday—remember?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Sunday, Mrs. Pike an' me was all by ourself, Mr. Pike and Fred had gone over to Eagle Lake sayin' they was goin' to catch 'em some fish, but they didn't. So we was settin' in Mrs. Pike's car, is a 1933 Dodge—"

"1933, eh," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"—And we was gettin' us a Jax beer apiece, that's the beer that Mrs. Pike says is made in New Orleans so she won't drink no other kind. So I seen you drive up to the drugstore and run in for just a secnt and come out with what looked like a perscription. So I says

to Mrs. Pike, just to be makin' conversation like, 'Right yonder's Mrs. Fletcher, she's one of my regular customers,' I says."

"I had on a figured print," said Mrs. Fletcher tentatively.

"You sure did," agreed Leota. "So Mrs. Pike she give you a good look, she's very observant, a good judge of character—cute as a minute, you know—and she says, 'I bet you another Jax that lady's three months on the way.'"

"What gall!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "Mrs. Pike!"

"Mrs. Pike ain't goin' to bite you," said Leota. "Mrs. Pike is a lovely girl. Can't sit still a minute. We went to the travelin' freak show yestiddy after work, down in the vacant store on South Main. What, you ain't been?"

"No, I despise freaks," declared Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself."

"What twins?" asked Mrs. Fletcher out of the side of her mouth.

"Well honey, they got these two twins in a bottle, see, born joined plum together, dead a course." Leota dropped her voice into a soft lyrical hum. "They was about this long—pardon—must have been full time all right, wouldn't you say, an' they had these two heads and two faces and four arms and four legs, all kind of joined *here*. See, this face looked this-a-way, and the other face looked that-a-way, over their shoulder, see. Kinda pathetic."

"Glah!" said Mrs. Fletcher disapprovingly.

"Well, ugly? Honey, I mean to tell you. Their parents was first cousins, and things like that. Billy Boy, git me a fresh towel from off Thelma's stack, this'n's wringin'-wet, and quit ticklin' my ankles with that curler. I declare! He don't miss nothin'."

"Me and Mr. Fletcher ain't one speck of kin, or he could never of had me," said Mrs. Fletcher placidly.

"Of course not!" protested Leota. "Neither is me and Fred, not that we know of. Well honey, what Mrs. Pike liked was the pygmies. They've got these pygmies down there too, an' Mrs. Pike was just wild about 'em. You know, the tiniest people in the universe? Well honey, they can just rest back on their little bohunkus and roll around and you can't hardly tell if they're sittin' or standin'. That'll give you some idea. They're about forty-two years old. Just suppose it was your husband!"

"Well, my husband is five foot nine and a half," said Mrs. Fletcher quickly.

"Fred's five foot ten," said Leota, "but I tell him he's a shrimp and he knows it. Account of I'm so tall." She made a deep wave over Mrs. Fletcher's temple with the comb. "Well these pygmies are a kind of dark brown, Mrs. Fletcher. Not bad looking for what they are, you know."

"I wouldn't care for them," said Mrs. Fletcher. "What does that Mrs. Pike see in them?"

"Aw I don't know," said Leota. "She's just cute, that's all. But they got this man, this petrified man, that everything ever since he was nine years old, when it goes through his digestion, see, somehow Mrs. Pike says it goes to his joints and has been turning to stone."

"How awful!" said Mrs. Fletcher.

"He's forty-two, too. That looks like a bad age."

"Who said so, that Mrs. Pike?" Mrs. Fletcher flared up.

"Naw, Mrs. Pike didn't like the petrified man much," said Leota. "Not as much as some of the others, she didn't. He could move his head, like this; a course his head and mind ain't a joint, so to speak, and I guess his stomach ain't either, not yet anyways. See—his food, he eats it, and it goes down, see, and then he digests it—" Leota rose on her toes for an instant; "and it goes out to his joints, and before you know it it's stone, pure stone. He's turning to stone. How's you like to be married to a guy like that? He can move his head like this. A course he *looks* just *terrible*!"

"I should think he would," said Mrs. Fletcher frostily. "Mr. Fletcher takes bending exercises every night of the world. I make him."

"All Fred does is lay around the house like a rug. The petrified man can move his head like this, though," said Leota reminiscently, turning her own head a few inches to one side. "But Mrs. Pike couldn't stand him: she likes a man to be a good dresser and all that."

"Is Mr. Pike a good dresser?" asked Mrs. Fletcher skeptically.

"Oh, well, yeah," said Leota. "But he's twelve-fourteen years older'n her. She ast Lady Evangeline about him."

"Who's Lady Evangeline?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well it's this mind reader they got in the freak show," said Leota. "Was real good. Lady Evangeline's her name and if I had another dollar I'd go straight back and have my other palm read. A course I ought not to. She has what Mrs. Pike said was the sixth mind, though."

"What did she tell Mrs. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"She told her Mr. Pike was true to her, all right," said Leota.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Fletcher.

"She didn't tell me nothin' extra about my nature, or anything, but she said . . . Well, I tell you, Mrs. Fletcher, I use to go with this boy got married last September to this girl, see. About three and a half years ago, that was when you was still goin' to the Robert E. Lee Beauty Shop in Jackson. He married her for her money. Another fortuneteller tole me that at the time. So I'm not in love with him any more anyway, besides bein' married to Fred, but Mrs. Pike thought just for the sport of the thing, see, to ask Lady Evangeline—"

"Does Mrs. Pike know everything about you already?" Mrs. Fletcher asked unbelievably. "Good fathers above."

"Oh yeah, I told her ever'thing about ever'thing, from now on back to I don't know when: to when I first started goin' out," said Leota. "So I ast Lady Evangeline was he happily married, and she says 'Honey,' she says, 'naw he idn't. You write down this day, March eight, 1937,' she says, 'and mock it down like I say, three years from today him an' her won't be occupyin' the same bed,' and she says, 'You ought to be glad you didn't git him, because he's so mercenary.' So I'm glad I married Fred. She says, 'There's fairer fields for you, dearie.' I guess that meant Fred."

"Did Mrs. Pike believe in what the fortuneteller said?" asked Mrs. Fletcher in a superior tone of voice.

"Lord yes, she's from New Orleans. She knows they've got this sixth mind for a fact. One of them in New Orleans says to Mrs. Pike one summer she was goin' to go from state to state and meet some gray-headed men, and sure enough, she says she went on a beautician convention up to Chicago—"

"Oh," said Mrs. Fletcher, "is Mrs. Pike a beautician too?"

"Oh, lord, yes!" protested Leota. "That's one thing right off the bat . . . I'm goin' to git her in here if I can. Before she married. But it's kind of left her, you know. So she says sure enough, there

was three men who was a very large part of making her trip what it was, and they all three had gray hair and they went in six states. Got Christmas cards from 'em. A course Mrs. Pike says they was married men, and she didn't care for them in that way, but still. Billy Boy, go see if Thelma's got any dry cotton. Look how Mrs. Fletcher's a-drippin'."

"Where did Mrs. Pike meet Mr. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher primly.

"On another train," said Leota.

"I met Mr. Fletcher, or rather he met me, in a rental library," said Mrs. Fletcher with dignity.

"Honey, me and Fred, we met in a rumble seat eight months ago and we was practically what you might call on the way to the altar inside of a half an hour," said Leota in a guttural voice and bit a bobby pin open. "Course it didn't last. Mrs. Pike says nothin' like that ever lasts."

"Mr. Fletcher and myself are as much in love as the day we married," said Mrs. Fletcher belligerently.

"Mrs. Pike says it don't last," repeated Leota. "Now go git under the dryer. I'll come back and comb you out. Durin' lunch time I promised to give Mrs. Pike a facial. You know, free. Her bein' in the business, so to speak."

"I bet she needs one," remarked Mrs. Fletcher, letting the swinging door fly back against Leota as she followed her out. "Oh, pardon me."

A week later, on time for her appointment, Mrs. Fletcher sank heavily into Leota's chair and looked in a discouraged way into the mirror.

"You can tell it when I'm sittin' down, all right," she said.

Leota looked preoccupied and stood shaking out a lavender cloth. She began to pin it around Mrs. Fletcher's neck in silence.

"I said you sure can tell it when I'm sittin' straight on comin' at you this way," Mrs. Fletcher said.

"Why, honey, naw you can't," said Leota gloomily. "Why, I'd never know. If somebody was to come up to me on the street an' say, 'Mrs. Fletcher is lookin' pregnant,' I'd say, 'Heck, she don't look it to me!'"

"If a certain party hadn't found it out and spread it around, it wouldn't be too late even now," said Mrs. Fletcher frostily, but

Leota was almost choking her with the cloth, pinning it so tight, and she couldn't even speak clearly. She paddled her hands in the air until Leota wearily loosened her.

"Listen, honey, you're just a virgin compared with Mrs. Montjoy," Leota was going on, still absent-minded. She bent Mrs. Fletcher backwards in the chair, and sighing, tossed liquid soap from a teacup onto her head and dug both hands into her scalp. "You know Mrs. Montjoy: her husband's that premature-gray-headed fella?"

"She's in the Trojan Needlework Society, is all I know," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well, honey," said Leota, but in a weary voice, "she come in here not the week before and not the day before she had her baby, she come in here the very selfsame day, I mean to tell you. Child, we was all plum scared to death. There she was! Come for her shampoo an' set. Why Mrs. Fletcher, in a hour and twenty minutes she was layin' up there in the Babtist Hospital with a seb'm pound son. It was that close a shave."

"What gall," said Mrs. Fletcher. "I never knew her at all well."

"See, her husband was waitin' outside in the car and her bags was all packed an' in the back seat, and she was all ready, 'cept she wanted a shampoo an' set. An' havin' one pain right after another. Her husband kep' comin' in here, scared-like, but couldn't do nothin' with her a course. She yelled bloody murder too, but she always yelled her head off when I give her a perm'nent."

"She must have been crazy," said Mrs. Fletcher. "How did she look?"

"Shoot!" said Leota deprecatingly.

"Well, I can guess," said Mrs. Fletcher. "Awful."

"Just wanted to look pretty while she was havin' her baby, is all," said Leota airily. "Course we was glad to give the lady what she was after, that's our motto, but I bet a hour later she wasn't payin' no mind to them little end-curls. I bet she wasn't thinkin' about she ought to have on a net. It wouldn't of done her no good if she had. Yeah man, she was a-yellin'. Just like when I give her a perm'nent, if possible."

"Her husband ought to could make her behave, don't it seem that way to you?" asked Mrs. Fletcher. "He ought to put his foot down."

"Shoot," said Leota. "A lot he could do. Maybe some women is soft."

"Oh, you mistake me, I don't mean for her to get soft, I don't think of myself as soft!" cried Mrs. Fletcher. "But I ask Mr. Fletcher's advice now and then. Especially on perm'nents. He says what does he know about perm'nents—go ahead."

"Huh! If I ever taken Fred's advice, we'd be livin' out in a houseboat on the Yazoo River or somethin' by this time," said Leota. "I'm sick of Fred. I tole him to go over to Vicksburg."

"Is he going?" demanded Mrs. Fletcher.

"Sure. See, the fortuneteller—went back and had my other palm read since we got to rent the room agin—said my lover was goin' to work in Vicksburg, so I don't know who else she could mean. And Fred sure ain't workin' here."

"Is he really going?" asked Mrs. Fletcher, "and—"

"If he lives an' don't nothin' happ'm between now and tomorrow," said Leota grimly. "He don't want to go but I ain't gonna put up with nothin' like that. Lays around the house an' bulls—did bull—with that good-for-nothin' Mr. Pike. Billy Boy, take Mrs. Grover that *Screen Secrets*, and leg it."

Mrs. Fletcher heard stomping footsteps go out the door.

"Is that Mrs. Pike's little boy here again?" she asked, sitting up gingerly.

"Yeah, that's still him." Leota stuck out her tongue.

Mrs. Fletcher could hardly believe her eyes. "Well! How's Mrs. Pike, your attractive new friend with the sharp eyes who spreads it around town that everybody's pregnant so they can't do anything about it?" she asked in a sweetened voice.

"Oh, Mrs. Pike." Leota combed Mrs. Fletcher's hair with heavy strokes. "Did I tell you about the awful luck we had, me and Fred? Well, you know, we rented out our room to this Mr. and Mrs. Pike from New Orleans when Sal and Joe Fentress got mad at us 'cause they drank up some beer we had in the closet, Sal and Joe did. Well, a week ago Sat'day Mr. and Mrs. Pike moved in. And I kinda fixed up the room, you know, put a sofa pilla on the couch and picked some ragged robins, but they never did say they appreciated it. Anyway, then I put some old magazines on the table."

"I think that was lovely," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Wait. So come night 'fore last, Fred and this Mr. Pike was

back from they said they was fishin', bein' as neither one of 'em has got a job to his name, and we was all settin' around in their room. So Mrs. Pike was settin' there readin' a old *Startlin' Detective* that was mine, mind you, I'd bought it my own self, and all of a sudden she jumps!—into the air—you'd a-thought she'd set on a spider, an' says 'Canfield'—ain't that silly, that's Mr. Pike—'Canfield, my God amighty,' she says, 'honey,' she says, 'we're rich, and you won't have to work.' Not that he turned one hand anyway. Well, me and Fred rushes over to her, and Mr. Pike too, and there she sets, pointin' her finger at a photo in my copy of *Startlin' Detective*. 'See that man,' yells Mrs. Pike, 'remember him, Canfield?' 'Well, why shouldn't I, dear,' says Mr. Pike, 'it's Mr. Petrie, that we stayed with him in the apartment next to ours in Toulouse Street in New Orleans for six weeks. Mr. Petrie.' 'Well!' Mrs. Pike says, like she can't hold out one secont longer, 'Mr. Petrie is wanted for five hundred dollars cash, for rapin' four women in California, and I know where he is.' "

"Mercy!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "Where was he?"

"Know where he was?" Leota flung a towel around her customer's head and wrapped it into a turban. "Nowhere else but in that freak show! I saw him just as plain as Mrs. Pike. *He* was the Petrified Man!"

"Who would ever have thought that!" cried Mrs. Fletcher sympathetically.

"So Mr. Pike says, 'Well whatta you know about that,' an' he looks real hard at the photo and whistles. And she starts dancin' and singin' about their good luck. She meant our bad luck! Can you beat it? That magazine was layin' around the house for a month and there was five hundred dollars in it for somebody. And there was the freak show goin' night an' day not two steps away from my own beauty parlor, with Mr. Petrie just settin' there waitin'. And it had to be Mr. and Mrs. Pike: almost perfect strangers."

"What gall," said Mrs. Fletcher. Leota was snagging and pulling her hair dreadfully in her distraction, combing it dry, but she did not mind.

"She goes around actin' like she thinks she was Mrs. God," said Leota. "So they're goin' to leave tomorrow. And in the meantime, I've got to keep that dirty filthy little ole kid here, gettin' under my feet ever' minute of the day an' talkin' back too."

"Have they gotten the five hundred dollars for the reward already?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well," said Leota, "at first Mr. Pike didn't want to do anything about it—can you feature that? Said he kinda liked that old bird and said he was real nice to 'em, lent 'em money or somethin'. But Mrs. Pike simply tole him he could just go to hell, and I can see her point. She says, 'You ain't worked a lick in six months and here I make five hundred dollars in two seconts, and what thanks do I get for it? You go to hell,' she says. So," Leota went on in a despondent voice, "they called up the cops and they caught the old bird all right, right there in the freak show where I saw him with my own eyes, thinkin' he was petrified. He's the one. Did it under his real name: Mr. Petrie. Four women in California, last August. So Mrs. Pike gits five hundred dollars. And my magazine, and right next door to my beauty parlor. I cried all night, but Fred said it wasn't a bit of use, because the whole thing was just a sort of coincidence—you know: can't do nothin' about it. But he says it put him clean out of the notion of goin' to Vicksburg till we rent out the room agin—no tellin' who we'll git this time. Somebody else to take advantage."

"But can you imagine them knowing this old man, that's raped four women?" persisted Mrs. Fletcher, and shuddered audibly. "Did Mrs. Pike *speak* to him when she met him in the freak show?"

"Well, I says to her, I says, 'I didn't notice you fallin' on his neck when he was the Petrified Man. Don't tell me you didn't recognize your old friend?' And she says, 'I didn't recognize him with that white powder all over his face. He just looked familiar,' Mrs. Pike says, 'and lots of people look familiar.' But she says that old petrified man did put her in mind of somebody. She wondered who it was. Kep' her awake, which man she'd ever knew it reminded her of. So when she seen the photo, it all come to her. Like a flash. Mr. Petrie. The way he'd turn to look at her when she took him in his breakfast."

"Took him in his breakfast!" shrieked Mrs. Fletcher. "Listen—don't tell me. I'd a-felt something."

"Four women. I guess those women didn't have the faintest notion at the time they'd be worth a hundred an' twenty-five bucks apiece some day to Mrs. Pike. We ast her how old the fella was then,

and she says he musta had one foot in the grave at least. Can you beat it?"

"Not really petrified at all, of course," said Mrs. Fletcher meditatively. She drew herself up in fully restored superiority. "I'd a-felt something," she said proudly.

"Shoot! I did feel somethin'," said Leota. "I tole Fred when I got home I felt so funny. I said, 'Fred, that ole petrified man sure did leave me with a funny feelin'.' He says, 'Funny-haha or funny-peculiar?' and I says, 'Funny-peculiar.' " She pointed her comb into the air emphatically.

"I'll bet you did," said Mrs. Fletcher.

They both heard a crackling noise.

Leota screamed, "Billy Boy! What you doin' in my purse?"

"Aw, I'm just eatin' these ole stale peanuts up," said Billy Boy.

"You come here to me!" screamed Leota, throwing the wet towel recklessly over Mrs. Fletcher's half-set waves. "I've had enough out of you men—this is the last straw!"

She picked up a hairbrush and bent toward the child.

"I caught him! I caught him!" giggled Mrs. Fletcher. "I'll hold him on my lap. You bad, bad boy, you!"

Leota paddled him heartily with the brush, while he gave angry but belittling screams which penetrated beyond the swinging door and filled the whole curious beauty parlor, and the wild-haired ladies began to gather around to watch. Billy Boy kicked both Leota and Mrs. Fletcher as hard as he could.

"There my little man," gasped Leota. "You won't be able to set down for a week if I knew what I was doin'."

Billy Boy stomped through the ladies and went out the door, but flung back the words, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?"

FAMILY HISTORY

P. M. Pasinetti

THE RAUCOUS breathing of the girl on the bed was totally extinguished. Straight and pale near Giovanna, Jacopo had stood intent, looking at the bed, curiosity in his terror. He realized that all his years before today had been empty of significance, had been lived carelessly; he remembered that never before had he witnessed this fact which had just unfolded before him. Now the thing had happened, now an ordinary and familiar girl, the sister of Giovanna, a person till then insignificant, with red hair and many freckles, after hours of broken and raucous breathing, had grown calm, had become immobile and inaccessible in front of his fixed look.

He became aware that Giovanna had taken him by the arm and was leading him slowly toward the dining room. Here the curtains were lowered over the closed windows; a grandfather's clock ticked by the wall. The air of the night before was yet in the room. He looked questioningly at Giovanna; he thought that she should abandon this house, that now all belonging to the past was drained of meaning.

The woman said to him: "Go home, you are tired." She spoke with a voice broken by fatigue. He did not understand why she was telling him to go. "Go away, go home," she repeated anxiously. "Why don't you go home, go home and rest."

In the streetcar there were employees going to work and children with schoolbooks, and one by one, they all got off. The streetcar reached the less frequented streets, flanked by high trees. He stared through the window, waiting for something extraordinary to happen. But there was his house, and he descended hurriedly; he entered, and without looking at the objects about him, he ran to his bedroom, and stretched out upon the bed. He fell into a profound sleep almost at once.

It was late afternoon when he awoke. He went into the living room, and sat down before the writing desk. He could not move, he found, and it seemed impossible that he had been left to live, in freedom, before a usual day, with the thought of habitual occupations. He feared the remembrance of the death, of the slow illness. With terror, he went over the remembrance of those days, that broken rattle, that listening as she became more isolated and incomprehensible; the last verdict of the doctors; the end; that grayish skin. It seemed to him that he was perilously involved in those episodes. He felt her death attached to his own body like an infection.

The house which he could see from his window was isolated from the others. At this periphery of the city, considerable spaces separated one building from another. In the street, automobiles occasionally passed, and every half hour the streetcar. The shadow of the building was lengthening across the street, when, from the back part of his own house, where the garden was, he heard the prolonged sound of the bell burst forth with a sudden and nervous decision. He thought that it might be Giovanna; he ran, not without consternation and anxiety, toward the door which gave on the stairs, and went down into the garden.

At the top of the small gate, through the iron bars which guarded the small opening there, he recognized the hair of his sister, which was reddish blond, somewhat burnished. Then he stopped, for he was not sure. He called out, "Malvina!" and from the street that head answered: "Yes, Jacopo." He went slowly toward the gate, construing mentally the first phrase to be pronounced.

But he did not use that phrase, because as soon as she confronted him, she spoke. "What's wrong with you?" she demanded, and her glance covered him from head to foot, possessing him.

"Let's go inside," he said, going ahead; "let's go up to my study."

On the doorstep the woman passed ahead, and then mounted the stairs with firm and rapid tread. She wore a dark brown dress, masculine in cut and rather threadbare, and dogskin gloves, with holes in them. As soon as she entered the room, she took the gloves off, and threw them, with her hat, on the piano; then she sat in a deep leather armchair, crossed her legs, and lit a cigarette. "What's the matter? How do you feel?" she repeated, passing her fingers

hurriedly through her short hair and looking at her brother with tranquil green eyes, lacking curiosity.

"Nothing has happened—to me," he said, unwillingly, and avoided Malvina's look, which passed, calm and investigating, from his forehead to his eyes, to the necktie, to the suit. She took a long breath, and finally, as though detaching herself from him, threw back her head and let go a large patch of smoke. "You were there till the end? You saw everything?" she asked finally, in a competent and composed tone. Then, as her brother's face went pallid, she added: "Of course, I don't know anything for certain, I'm really guessing." Then, after a pause: "I knew you went there often. Last year I used to see you at concerts with them. I would be alone, and watch you from the gallery. You were with them a great deal." Not attending to her words, he heard her voice and thought that it was the same voice as in the days when they had lived with their father and mother. And he felt, as though with remorse, how time had dried up their relationship.

"I would see you at the diving meets," Malvina was saying, "all three of you. The sister was smaller than Giovanna. Isn't that so? And rather ugly compared to her."

Jacopo was silent, and on his face was the expression of a person detected in a misdeed. The words of Malvina made him tremble, and yet he almost wished that they might continue.

"You were there, you were there till the end," asserted the sister, pitying, studying that pale face as if reading there. She shook her head two or three times, saying, "You shouldn't have got mixed up in it. You should have avoided those people, you should have avoided being at the death of Andreina."

He was astounded, momentarily, to discover that she knew the name of the dead girl. But she would know. Always, she had known things. He felt himself inevitably, sweetly humbled.

She had always overpowered him. He remembered her, when she was about thirteen and he eight, a thin, strong little girl playing in the garden of the country house. She would hunt certain large flies and when she caught one she would keep it gently imprisoned in her small fist until she reached the fish pond. Then, bending over, she would stretch out on the pebbles, reaching forth with an elbow placed on the edge of the pond, her grave face reflected in the water; she would put her loosely closed fist under water so that the fly

should drown slowly. "I can feel it move," she would say with persuasive tranquillity, "I swear, I feel it moving." Then the child, after some moments of silence, would rise, her knees red and marked by the pebbles, her dress soiled. She would look at length, without expression, at her brother. He would not speak, feeling inferior and impotent, staring at her with wonderment and disgust. Sometimes she had also killed other insects, small birds, and even two or three cats. On such occasions she did not seem to feel pleasure, but rather an immense interest, which, for her brother, was a dread, inexplicable thing.

"Why did you go to those women?" she was insisting now, her voice drawing him from remembrance. "What did you go there for? Did you think you could get along with such people?" She spoke aridly, slowly, daring him. "Do you realize your error?" she asked, and then, as her brother made a brief gesture of rebellion, she smiled. "Or don't you understand what I mean, Jacopo?" she inquired persuasively, ironically.

"You don't know anything about me!" he exclaimed finally. But his voice weakened, and he gave ground. "It was terrible, you cannot understand," he concluded softly, like a person seeking help.

"I understand that among such people you are out of place," Malvina said. "That is all I understand."

He looked at her sadly, saying, "That has nothing to do with it now, Malvina."

But not attending him, she seemed to be inspecting his suit, which was very well cut, of fine gray wool, and on his shoulders hung a little loose, with a certain careless elegance. She regarded these items as though she found them important and suspicious. He felt the interest and disapproval in those glances. Even as a child he had secretly wished to appear distinguished and worldly, and she had always prevented him. There had been times when he dared to kiss a lady's hand. Blushing, he would feel himself descending into a deep abyss where the hand was, careless and fleeting like a dry leaf, and his lips would never seem to touch it. He would get up, feeling himself observed by his sister, metallic and smiling. In everything she overcame him; her habits and rules prevailed; they were respected and official. He would stand before her, looking at her in silence. And tonight, after so many years, Jacopo thought that, finally, he had never known her. And this was like discovering him-

self under laws which superiors had never even bothered to explain to him. "It is your fault!" he cried out, "that's what it is, your fault."

He sought, with his glance, the void; he spoke without conclusion, stuttering, animated by a vast and sudden revelation. "It was all your fault," he said, "you seemed to do it on purpose, watching over me, making me respect things not worthy of respect. Keeping me far away from dangers, ignorant, in the dark—"

"What are you talking about?" the sister demanded.

Jacopo's voice became lamenting and low, like that of a person who timidly offers a strange truth. "I had never seen a person die before this morning," he said, murmuringly. "Suddenly, I saw it, this morning. That room, that air. I'll breathe it all my life. It came suddenly. I was betrayed. Do you understand?" He was approaching her. The sister seemed to withdraw from him, her face hardening. "Do you understand, Malvina? Betrayed? Taken by the throat."

"Thank the Lord," the sister said, "thank heaven, you have always lived away from trouble." But the words came automatically, for, preoccupied, she was looking at her brother.

Jacopo smiled bitterly. "Keep quiet," he said. "You do nothing but make things worse." He continued to smile, thinking, "I am right, I am right!" in a mixture of triumph and fear. "I am evidently right," he said to himself, remembering the distant death of his father. When his father entered that last agony, his mother, with a gentle but determined gesture, had withdrawn him from the door-sill. Behind that dark walnut door, the forbidden events had taken place. The relatives had arrived with faces devastated by weeping. His sister had known abundant tears. His mother's eyes had been swollen, furred by dark veins, and she had bitten a handkerchief. He alone had remained calm. He alone—for, he saw suddenly, that was it—had not understood the true significance of the laments. To him it had not even been conceded to enter the dead man's study, to touch the books and objects. His life as a child had continued insipid and undisturbed, like a slow river. And now it was like discovering himself the victim of a long and complicated deceit. "Do you understand me, Malvina?" he burst out.

But suddenly, as when a sail falls, that look of pitiful indulgence which had been growing on Malvina's face as she regarded her

brother, dropped away. The firm and tranquil eyes, the neat and arid lineaments, were as before. She lifted a shoulder, then spoke with reasoned slowness: "You will ruin yourself, Jacopo, and you will come to tell me about it—even though you have not been to me for so long now—you will come to me, as you used to do in difficult moments, and I will tell you: Too late. And I'll remind you of this afternoon. I'll tell you: Too late, too late, and that's all."

"I knew that you did not understand me," he said in a cutting voice.

"Your career, for example, your career will be ruined. You will ruin yourself because you are one of those who can no longer work in agony. Your work will be finished, destroyed."

"My career?" he echoed, in a frightened and overcome voice. "What are you talking about? My career?"

"You understand me very well, you should know yourself well enough. Your future, that's all, your studies, the possibilities of advancement—everything will seem perfectly vain, you won't be able to give them any importance. Everything, in a few days of life with Giovanna and her sort, everything will go in a single breath. Then, later, you will be remorseful, you will find yourself finished, empty, abandoned."

"It isn't true," he uttered mechanically, his lips white; "it isn't true at all. So many years, and you still don't understand me."

While she looked at him with her calm and ironical patience, the telephone rang out.

"Explain to me at least what you mean, my career?" he demanded hurriedly, in a whisper, like one who is constrained to go and begs a final answer before going. The telephone rang again, and she pointed it out, coldly, not without a certain theatricality. "It is Giovanna," she said. "Why can't you make up your mind to answer?" Then she got up, and putting on her gloves, went toward the door beyond. She waited, while Jacopo was speaking, saying, yes, that he would come.

When he turned from the telephone she suggested: "Shall we go out together? I take the same streetcar up to a certain point. Giovanna lives up in the hills."

"Yes," he said, without surprise that his sister should know even this, "she lives in the hills, but she is not there. She told me to meet her somewhere else. Exactly in the opposite direction."

"Good-by, then," said Malvina.

"Good-by," he said, uncertainly, not moving to take her to the door. Suddenly, he said: "She's gone swimming, she's gone swimming, Malvina." Then, as his sister turned toward him: "Just after Andreina's death, she's gone to the swimming pool, with the others, to swim and dive."

"Well," Malvina said, "what of it?"

"I don't know," Jacopo said. Then he followed her down the steps.

In the street, they shook hands and parted, for his streetcar was already approaching.

He had to walk a couple of blocks from the carline to the swimming pool; and he might have passed the entrance, so great was his abstraction, if he had not seen Giovanna leaning against the doorway, without hat, with the sun lighting up her blond hair, and with her brown face turned toward the rays.

No expression except a composed seriousness was on her face when she gave him her hand. Looking her in the eyes, he shook hands. "Hello," he said, "and why are you here, why did you come?"

He observed her with marvel and pity, as one looks at a person who hasn't been able to free himself from a bad habit. The woman had short sleeves, her skin was dark, the flesh of her arms looked firm and resistant, and still cooled by the water. "Why did you come, why today, of all times?" he insisted, for she had not answered. Not the actions of the woman, but the fact that he did not understand them, disturbed him. This gave anxiety to his bearing, and cut short his phrases.

She shook her head in order to throw back her soft blond hair. "Let's go," she said. Her tone was very serious, like that of a person who suggests prudence: the tone of people who are in the house of the dead. Jacopo felt that he was, by now, definitely joined to that woman and that all for him would remain motionless at the same point and that time would no longer pass. "Who did you leave at home?" he said.

The woman passed a hand over her forehead.

"Have you a headache?" he asked with puerile courtesy. Embarrassed, he walked beside her, watching her smallest gesture. "And at the swimming pool," he asked, "who did you see?"

"Let's go and get some hot coffee somewhere," the woman said in a low voice.

They entered a large café, dark and half deserted. In a corner a single ray of sunlight struck the coffee machine and the napkin of a motionless waiter. As soon as she had the large, steaming cup before her, Giovanna grabbed it and drank a great gulp. Then she looked at Jacopo, and began to answer.

"Carmela is at home," she murmured. "She came, she wanted me to sleep, but I told her, 'Carmela, do me the favor of not talking, let me be, I'll sleep when I need it.' And she insisted, she said I would ruin my nerves, I would end by going to pieces. 'Carmela, I beg you,' I told her, 'do me the favor, be quiet. I called you to help me, not to take away my peace.' It is terrible, everybody comes around, there isn't any way to be left alone for a moment, all those people who talk, it is terrible—"

"Yes, yes, that is true," the young man said, with a sudden, fervent burst of agreement, reaching over toward the woman; "it is very true, people want to speak while we would like to be alone—" It seemed that in act and word he would associate her to that solitude; vaguely it seemed to him that the death which they had watched over together had joined them, as though they had committed something together. He took one of her beautiful, dark hands, and held it firmly. "These terrible days will pass, Giovanna," he said with a certain effort, "and we shall be together, always."

The woman withdrew her hand at once.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Are you ill?"

Then when she made no answer, he said, "Who did you see to-day when you went swimming?"

Abstractedly, she mentioned three or four names, names of friends of hers who worked during the day in the offices of lawyers, in hospitals, in banks, earning enough and not aspiring further. At night they were accustomed to see Giovanna. They would go out with her and drink until their eyes grew still and bright, their voices more raucous and thick, their walk more unsteady.

"And about poor Andreina," he asked timidly, "what did they say about poor Andreina?"

"Nothing," Giovanna said. "Only Dick, he complained because I didn't send for him. He said: 'You should have done it just the same, even if there wasn't any hope. I would have come.' He is a

very good doctor, but good doctors don't count in certain cases, isn't that true? 'You should have sent for me at any hour,' he said. And when I said that there had been no hope, he complained that I hadn't called him."

"And that's all?" said Jacopo.

"They said they would pass by a moment tonight, later," she said, "to go up for a moment to poor Andreina." The woman sighed, very tired. "They cried," she added finally. And he thought with envy of those people who, in crying, had commemorated the deceased with normal fervor. Giovanna, leaning forward, holding her cheeks between closed fists, continued her equal murmuring: "And this morning toward eleven, the parish priest also came. He stayed a short time—he has aged a great deal—and then toward half past eleven, the bell rang again, and a woman came up, it was your sister. I used to know your sister years ago, but I didn't remember her well. At first I asked myself what she wanted, but I didn't ask her, in fact, I tried to be very friendly with her. 'Malvina,' I said, 'here we see each other after all this time, I don't find you changed much,' but she was wandering about the room, she seemed to be sniffing. And when she went in to see poor Andreina, she stopped suddenly and stayed motionless, and looked at her for a long time."

Jacopo saw the room again, smelled the odor of medicine and flowers, saw the curtain of the window in the wind that had risen toward early morning, and now, new and straight in the center, the tall, immobile figure of his sister, straight as the candles at the corners of the bed, with the reflection of the flames that played upon her dry lineaments, about her jaws and her green eyes. He shook himself. "But that woman is crazy!" he exclaimed. "Why did she come? How did she know?"

"How can I know? I thought you had spoken to her about it. In fact, I thought at first that she might have come with a message from you."

"But my sister doesn't know about us— If she knows, she doesn't know from me. She has nothing to do with my life. Nothing. I have never talked about you to my sister."

"Because you are ashamed of it," Giovanna explained gently. "But your sister knows me very well, just the same. You are ashamed of me, you know."

"Don't say that, Giovanna, you know it's not true," he cried,

"It's only that I and my sister, well, in late years we have grown—how shall I say—a little distant, that's all."

"That's your business," Giovanna said, "but it doesn't deny the fact that you're ashamed of me."

He watched the face of the woman as though he were discovering something there. "I am," he said to himself, "ashamed of her. It is horrible, but in fact, isn't it true?"

For he had awakened in the thick of night, many times, and had been clutched by the thought of Giovanna and the terror that his relation with her would bring him evil; and he had remained, his eyes distended in the dark, rigid with fear. He had imagined people intent on speaking evil of him. Once he had dreamed that he was entering a great building, almost certainly the seat of a famous commercial house, and that he was crossing many rooms finally to reach a warm, elegant office, where he stood in the presence of a manager, who, fat and indifferent, sat in a vast armchair before a great, shining desk, full of papers. The manager had looked at him from top to bottom, playing meanwhile with the heavy gold chain of his watch. "You're a fine young man," he had said, "a fine young man who could do much in this world, because you are talented; but you are not serious. You have let yourself be ruined. You did not follow the brilliant example of your father, who was an upstanding, noble, and adamant figure—" Frightened and confused, he had rushed from the office, hat in hand, toward a vast night through which rain poured. "I should have answered that it was impossible," he had thought then, running, bent under tempestuous gust, "I should have told him that I didn't know my father, that they didn't let me go into the room." He had seen again the thick walnut door, the gentle and decided gesture of his mother forbidding him. He would have liked to return to the manager and explain how things were, but as he tried to form the phrases of explanation, the pain of the effort jerked him clean awake.

"You musn't worry about it," Giovanna was saying, "because if you're ashamed of me, I would say that it is a natural fact. Don't think that I despise you, that I want to throw something in your face. You are an egotist, Jacopo, but exactly for that reason, I can't help but feel a certain admiration for you. We have always got along perfectly well, so well that I have become sincerely fond of you." He tried to interrupt her, but the woman continued stub-

bornly. "Yes, Jacopo, you are an egotist, you don't care a thing about any of us, but I admire you, you have a sure future, you will probably become very rich. Not a single one of my friends has as much chance as you have, and then, you are respected by people, while instead, consider a woman like me. How do you suppose I could fail to admire all of this?"

"And what does it matter?" he cried. "What do I care about these things now?"

But inevitably, like an involuntary grimace, exactly at that moment there came to him the remembrance of his very old uncle Federico. He saw himself, able and useful, bent over the bedstead of the old man, to straighten the cover and give him a lemonade; he remembered the sincerity that he had been able to express in those acts, the affection that he had almost succeeded in feeling, and finally the plans he had made to use the inheritance on which he felt he could certainly count.

"It's very stupid, how you seek to defend yourself, it seems that you think that there's something shameful," continued the woman; "it is really very stupid. In fact, you defend yourself while there's absolutely no one offending you. You know very well that I and all my friends, we all have a great affection, a great fondness for you."

"I am a stranger among you," said the young man, "that's what I am, you don't consider me one of you."

"That's obvious," said Giovanna. "We can't do anything about it, it's perfectly natural."

"You must be aware that I can no longer do without you," said Jacopo; "that is all, this fact is above all, you must understand me, Giovanna, I can't leave you any more."

"Why?" said the woman with surprise and concern. "When did these things come into your head?"

"This morning," said Jacopo, "since we were together in front of Andreina, since we have seen. Many things have happened, many new things have happened in my life."

His tone was too certain for the woman to interrupt. He spoke without looking at her, as if discovering each word in the act of pronouncing it. "I must live with you, Giovanna, only this, now I am forever tied to you, there's nothing more to be done about it."

"You are mad," said the woman in a very low voice. "What do you want to do? Do you want to marry me?" In defense, she at-

tached herself to things concrete: "Do you know what your sister told me this morning, do you know why she came? Do you know that she came exactly in order to prevent this, that she begged me and that finally she even demanded that I leave you? Do you know this?"

"But she won't gain anything. My sister has nothing to do with me. She is my sister but now I know there's never been any affection between us and there never has been any possibility of understanding each other. It is as if we belonged to two different worlds. I am sure of this now. From childhood on our relationship has been always more insincere, always more ruinous."

"You're dishonest," she said sadly; "pretty soon you too will be like her, you will tell her she is right. You are false, Jacopo. It won't take much. It will be enough for her to speak to you of your family, of the life of your father. Or that she tell you how profoundly she despises me and my way of living, my friends, my people—"

"We will speak to her right away," repeated Jacopo; "we will stop this error once and for all. Now I'm going to phone her and we'll go there." He got up; Giovanna took him by an arm.

"You won't phone her," she said. "We certainly won't go to her, we won't do any of this, absolutely nothing."

"I want to convince you," said Jacopo, "I want to remove all ambiguity once and for all."

"Why?" the woman said. "If there's any ambiguity between your sister and you, you will straighten it out, and anyhow, it's none of my business."

"I'll go crazy if things go on this way, all this must finish, we will go to Malvina, all will be clear then." He detached himself brusquely from the woman. He went to the telephone, which was in the next room. For a long time he tried to reach his sister but did not succeed. Then he returned to Giovanna's table, but she was no longer there.

II

Uncle Federico was extremely old. He had taken part in some of those wars that have already entered into the next to the last chapter of schoolbooks. His wife had been a beautiful and mild woman, with a velvet ribbon around her neck, a woman apparently

too fragile for him, but capable of a hidden force suspected only by a few intimates. "Maria Luisa is like iron," her husband used to say, as if he thus pronounced a material, physical truth. Maria Luisa had ended her life in great pain, on a spring day. That time had remained in the memory of Federico the most important and sad moment of his life. The windows of his wife's room were open on the orchard from which there came the perfume of the fruit blossoms. The woman had always had on her face a smile, tender and sweet, but now she felt herself overcome, always more inevitably, by physical pain; she was gripped by it; that smile became an immobile expression of surprise; that atrocious ill was inexplicable. She had believed serenity to be the characteristic of her life; but now she was too ill to be able to uphold it, so that she felt herself the victim of a promise betrayed. "If that's how it is, then death is better," she said one evening. The husband, enormous and erect by the bedstead, twisted his hands and cried in silence. At the moment of the end he bent over her as if to straighten the covers.

Jacopo had never known her. He had only known Uncle Federico and especially during the last two years he had visited him often. With the passing of time, his world had been narrowing always more. In the past, after having sold his holdings in a shipping company, he had got the habit of taking long walks by the seashore. Later he had been able to take walks as far as the public parks. Then, still later, he had remained almost entirely at home constructing models of sailing boats laboriously carved in wood. Now that paralysis had struck him, he had to be content with watching those models, aligned on tables or on mantel pieces; or else sometimes one of them was handed to him, that he might hold it on his lap, looking at it with circumspection, as if he sought something hidden in the argent sails.

With the passing of days he always became more intolerant and bitter, especially since it had occurred to him that his nephews awaited his death in order to inherit his estate. Although he seemed to find it natural that they should indulge that expectation, he still fed his bitterness. He expressed this sentiment to Jacopo, son of one of his nephews, the only relative whose company he seemed to enjoy. His complaints against the others were never expressed in a direct form. Rather, they referred to times changed, to the cupidity and cowardice of the younger generations as a whole, to their am-

biguous, sinful, and parasitic character. According to his way of thinking, everybody lacked energy, the world presented a panorama of vileness and sloth. "Nowadays people are tenderfooted," he would say, for instance. And his tone was not emotional or irate; on the contrary, phrases of this sort came from his mouth firmly, after long meditations, like scientific truths. It was like when he had said, "She is of iron," speaking of his wife. Only with decrepitude, with the nearing of death, with the closing of days, was his certainty enfeebled. With his eyes he seemed to seize upon his nephew for advice and help. "But you never complain," he said one night. Jacopo, his eyes lowered, twisted his hands. "You never, never protest," repeated the old man, as if that attitude of Jacopo augmented in him the sense of discovering truths. "I do nothing but damn your relatives, and you are always silent, you just take it, you say nothing. Ah, ah!" He laughed aloud. There followed a grave, thoughtful silence. "You know what is wrong with you?" the old man said. "You have a cold heart." That evening he let the boy understand that he wanted to be left alone earlier than usual.

It was when he was going to call on the old man two days later, that Jacopo found Malvina not far from the door of Federico's house, which gave on one of the little, narrow streets leading down to the port.

"I'm on my way to him," Jacopo said.

"No, don't go," she said. She took him by the arm.

He detached himself with exaggerated violence. "I am going," he declared. Then, as though struck with sudden dubiety: "Has anything happened?"

"You know he's sick," the woman said.

"That's exactly the reason I'm going," he insisted, his voice again firm.

"He's very ill," Malvina repeated. Suddenly she demanded, "Aren't you sure enough, aren't you convinced by now?"

Looking at her, he felt as though he were falling from a great height.

"He's going to leave you everything," she said. "Nothing could be more certain."

His face was frozen with surprise, imploring.

"By now everything is certain," she insisted, "everything is set, don't you understand?"

And Jacopo kept on looking, as when they had been children, with his constant air of a victim. His sister always knew more than he, she always moved, unconcerned, in a world which she seemed to own and which Jacopo regarded with the frightened and respectful envy of the outcast. He turned his back and moved on slowly. He felt the hard and shining glance of the woman on his back. Then he heard the steps moving in the little street, with a rhythmic and equal sound, gradually fading.

From the port there came the moan of boats through the fog. He passed before the little door that gave into the garden of his uncle Federico, but he did not stop, going on to the port. Here the pavement was damper as if a mist breathed on it. Rails shone in front of him. Further on, there were workers busy unloading a big boat, a massive iron construction in the gray fog. The shadow of the boat darkened a piece of the dock where there were wagons, upturned boxes, ropes, piled-up lumber. Sometimes in his life he had thought of seeking a place in a shipping company and going to sea. He thought of the large extensions of sea beyond the port, beyond the fog. Above the half-empty boat, among the masts caught in the fog, there passed at times the sharp cry of gulls. Then there was an obscure sound of machinery, thumps and creakings of iron, and the dry sound of boxes unloading on the pavement, and the voices of the men. Jacopo thought that perhaps they spoke a strange language. There returned to him the vision of a livid and long-past dawn. He saw himself leaning against the rail of a boat that was entering a Slavic port. His father, tall and strong next to him, leaned his hand on his shoulder. The engines were barely turning over, and the boat slid very slowly toward a distant line of clear lights of the unknown port city that foretold a clean and empty embankment in the early morning. Unknown, new, strange people slept in that city, in that dawn. To Jacopo it now seemed that trips of that kind taken with his father had put him in fleeting contact with a world different from the rest, had indicated a way that led to things indecipherably new, a way that he had not followed.

But now he looked with absent eyes at the men, the boats, the water, and the fog, until suddenly the remembrance of Uncle Federico overcame him. "I am afraid," the boy thought, "I am so afraid that I'm cold all over." It seemed that the cold was spread-

ing in him, intimately, in the structure of the bones. "What is happening to me?" he demanded.

He turned toward the little side street; he found the door of his uncle's wall open; he entered and stopped in the little vegetable garden and listened to the house. But there only came to him, attenuated, the sounds of the port, as if the house in between no longer existed. He entered, and went up the narrow stairs. The steps were consumed with use, eroded by marine salt.

Not a single sound came from his uncle's room. For a moment he thought that the house was abandoned, that in the inside rooms there remained only the old furniture, the exotic objects belonging to his uncle, his wooden boats. "But it can't be possible," he thought; "somebody must be there. One of the relatives is there."

The door of Federico's room opened lightly, easily, as if moved by the wind. Tall and thin, without the least sound, Amilcare Brea came out. Jacopo could no longer have any doubt. Evidently the thing had happened. By now the relatives had come to the place, they had come to weep, to murmur, and to accomplish secret inventories. He looked at Cousin Brea with hatred.

"Come," Brea said, drawing near, taking him gently by the wrist, "come outside with me a moment. Calm yourself. Come." Jacopo was unable to answer, he could only let himself be dragged away. Brea let him out of the house; he made him walk a little; and finally he made him enter a café. When they were seated in front of each other with the steaming cups between, Jacopo spoke.

"What's happened?" he asked. "What were you doing up there?" His tone was that of a dare, expressing compressed and intense need of violence. "I knew that I would find you, sooner or later," he continued, his words pouring out torrentially, but clear. "You, Brea, you are the relative one meets only in the mornings of deaths or of funerals. I can't stand you. Just to see you is to know that there's been a misfortune in the house. You are the evil omen. You are a barometer. Your presence is a proof of misfortune even more certain than the casket or the sound of the funeral bell. You don't need to speak, Brea. It is enough to see you there."

"Jacopo, you are insane," said Cousin Brea, showing a compassionate calm. "What's going on in your mind? What are you talking about?"

"I can't imagine you in a theater, on a sea trip. Cemeteries, there you are, cemeteries are your background. Nothing is dear to you outside your family tomb. There was Aunt Matilde, who was fond of the family paintings, she would restore them, clean them. There was Tommaso, do you remember, Tommaso, who delighted in the piano, he used to come to tune it once in a while, he cleaned it, he took care of it. Instead, you have the tomb, you take flowers to the cemeteries out of superstition, out of mania. You are the most competent of all, a veritable master of ceremonies, in dealing with funerals. Look here, I want you to understand that I know what I am talking about. I have a real hatred of you, Brea, and I think Malvina feels the same too. Because you see, your mania renders you wicked. You talked against us. You talked against us because our grandfather's tomb was too plain—because in church when my father died there wasn't enough of a ceremony to suit your tastes—because one day you went to the cemetery and there were no fresh flowers on my mother's tomb. And you go about the city and you say that I'm going to pieces, that my friends are scum, that I am lost. I hate you, Brea. I've always hated you. What are you doing here? Why do you always have that air of being the most intimate, the most pained of all? Who gave you the right? Nobody. Brea, you've stolen it. You hang around us to feed on our misfortunes."

"Permit me only to ask you to be quiet," Brea said with forced calm. "Be quiet, Jacopo. You'll be sorry for what you say. Believe me when I tell you this: you'll be sorry."

But Jacopo, studying the man's face, said meditatively: "And your wife is exactly like you, Brea."

"I don't know why you talk about these things now," Brea said sadly, "why you insult Olimpia and me just now, of all times. Poor Federico dead a few hours, and you can think of something else, can treat his death with levity—" He stopped, as though overcome, and let some moments pass in silence. Then he raised his hand in a gesture of desolation and revulsion: "But yes, I know, I know what's on your mind. Well, be reassured. It is exactly as you expected. You inherit everything."

"I inherit everything?" Jacopo echoed through tightened lips.

"Everything," insisted the cousin rising, while his face exhibited

an infinite contempt mingled with the sweetness of feeling that contempt. "Be reassured. He said it before dying. He said it to your sister."

Jacopo looked at that face, contorted with disgust like the face of one who treads on spit, and thought, "The hatred of my relatives will be endless, now." And before getting up to go, he sought something to say, something simple and final. "Many in our family are scoundrels," he said detachedly, "but you, Brea, you are the biggest scoundrel of all. Do you get me? The biggest scoundrel of all."

Then Brea began to smile; and even after a long time Jacopo's memory held the image of that face with its ironical and nauseated smile.

Jacopo left the café. The thought of the inheritance, which for so long had filled him with pleasure, now frightened him almost to madness. He felt himself in the position of one who has unknowingly committed a crime and expects to be condemned by a law which he does not understand. He walked down the street, moving like a somnambulist, toward his house. And when he entered it, there was his sister, seated near the balcony, waiting.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

The woman turned her gaze from him, toward the street below. When she spoke, she seemed to be unaware of his presence. "The more his voice weakened," she said, "the more he asked for you."

"Why didn't you call me?" he asked harshly.

"We tried, but you weren't at home, as you very well know. Before we could reach you it was already over. When somebody went to Giovanna's you had gone."

"Who went to Giovanna's?"

"Olimpia Brea," she said.

"Are you all mad?" he exclaimed with the frightened amazement of one who hears that an infective and contaminating power has been loosed.

There had been an epoch when they, Jacopo and Malvina, had been almost joyous in despising their relatives. The phrases which Jacopo now pronounced belonged to that distant fashion. "I went with *our* Brea to the café," he said. "He is the most exquisitely macabre of our cousins. What! I thought when I saw him, you here, Brea here! Wasn't he dead? No, not dead. His duty is to bury. He himself will never die."

His sister looked at him. "You aren't well, Jacopo," she murmured, in a competent tone.

"Brea is a rascal," Jacopo continued with a convinced sadness. "He's a dangerous, ruinous element. He could be defined as one of the cancerous nodules of our family." He glanced sidewise at his sister, as though expecting, without being sure, a gesture of approval. "Why do we find him among us so often? Or rather, only because there are so many deaths in our family. What's happening to our family? We are crumbling away."

"It's quite natural," Malvina said, "that in the history of families there should be deaths."

But Jacopo was paying no attention. "Brea is a scoundrel," he violently affirmed, seeming to suggest by his tone and vehemence that the blame for all those deaths rested in Brea. Then, with surprise, he discovered that his sister was weeping silently, the tears welling from her eyes and flowing down her cheeks. There was something sincere, clean, and traditional in those tears, a great sense of ceremonial confiding, of familiarity with death.

"Why, you're crying," he said, coming near her clumsily, being filled, as he watched, with envy.

She controlled herself immediately, but with no attempt at concealment. Then, with ease, like a person passing to another argument on a line already predetermined, she said: "And with this Giovanna? You don't intend to marry her?" It was that tone she had used in the old days of Jacopo's aspirations toward an elegant and worldly life, the tone in which she had said, for example, "Surely, you don't expect to go dancing at the De Ferrari?" A tone that permitted no answer.

"I can't avoid it," the boy said wearily. "It's the only solution. Since her sister has died—I don't know—but it seems that she has taught me something. Something I didn't know—"

"You ought to know what people will say about you. What the family will say."

"What does it matter?" he said.

"But it is exactly what ought to matter to you, Jacopo. You have a future, a career. If people—"

"What people?" he demanded bitterly.

"Our relatives. You know what they will say, especially now that you have managed to get Federico's money. And he didn't

only disinherit them, and leave his estate to you, whom they hate, but he cursed them. He cursed them on his deathbed. You weren't there, Jacopo—no, you were at Giovanna's when he was dying—but they were all there, and he cursed them. With Amilcare and Olimpia Brea on the front row. He seemed to taste the terrible words he said, and you never saw such hate in a man's eyes. Then he started to laugh, you know. In the way he used to laugh sometimes, near the end. He started to laugh that way, and you should have seen Brea, who always tried to play up to the old man—well, he couldn't play up to him then, he couldn't laugh, too. And so he just stood there, paralyzed. 'And what are you all doing?' the old man said. 'Why don't you hurry up, go buy the candles. Get the candles, by God! It's your party. The candles for the corners of the bed. Haven't you bought the candles?' "

"Stop it!" he almost screamed in anguish. It seemed that those words, with the terrible glances of the old man, were being now directed at him. And his sister's voice, pronouncing them, had almost sunk to a whisper, as if she herself had an obscure fear of them, as if, despite herself, she felt something unknown and fearful rising between her and her brother, something evoked by those words.

Then, more calmly, Jacopo said: "I'll stop them from slander. I'll go talk to them."

"Yes," she said, "and alienate them even more. There's enough already. I don't care about the vile things they say, but with you, Jacopo, it's different—"

"I'll go," he affirmed. "I'll go to Brea. Isn't he the ringleader? I'll go to their houses, and they'll stop, once and for all!" He had felt this impulse before, the impulse toward decisive action. But now it seemed sure, inevitable in its conclusion. New eras were opening up.

III

It was almost dusk when Brea's wife, Olimpia, came to open the door. "Jacopo," she said, as if announcing him to herself. Then she scrutinized him with her round, large, and calculating eyes. "Jacopo, what's the matter? Aren't you well?"

The boy put a foot on the step of the sill. "May I come in?" he asked. "Where's Brea?"

"What's wrong with you?" insisted the woman.

"I want to see Brea, I want to speak to him," said the boy, trying to make clear that that exact point was his only reason for his visit to the enemy house. "Isn't your husband here? I wanted to see him. I wanted to speak to him."

"What is it?" asked the woman once more, with dark and spectral patience that was a sign of the Breas just as a will-o'-the-wisp is an indication of graves. The boy didn't look at her. "My husband is at poor Federico's," she said finally, with a marked accent of superiority as though she were about to add, "and you should be there, too."

"I only have one thing to say to him," said Jacopo. "I only wanted to see him for a couple of minutes. I wanted to resume an interrupted conversation. Because you see, we were together at the café yesterday, and I didn't finish telling him certain things that I wanted to tell him. When is he coming back? Don't you know?" The woman didn't answer. She looked at him, folding her lips with disgust, with a firm, filthy, unhealthy evilness accumulated in the black depths of the eyes and in the white furred with dark veins.

"But maybe I can talk to you," he said, as if he discovered the woman in that moment, measuring her with her glance. "I can talk to you, if he is away—for lack of better, or rather, for lack of worse," he added, with that balanced and obsessed precision which was proper to his bitter discourtesy. "That's it. Listen, Olimpia, I know how much you counted on that inheritance. You two talked about it at night. And furthermore I know you can't stand us. Well, Olimpia, I know that this state of affairs cannot change. Because you see, I'm glad Federico hasn't left you anything. If I were able, in this moment, to enjoy, that's one of the things I would enjoy. Immensely." He looked at her with a light smile, a crinkling about his eyes which he held half closed as if to study minutely the woman's face. "You absolutely cannot imagine, Olimpia, you haven't even the slightest idea," he continued, as if that ignorance in the woman were detected by his close inspection of her face.

"Is it necessary for you to say these things?" demanded the woman in a haughty, grating, and bitter tone. "He doesn't even mention another relative, neither on his deathbed nor in his will. He doesn't even consider us worthy of licking his boots, and he

shows that he doesn't care for anyone except you, you alone among all the relatives, he leaves you everything, we don't even count like animals, not even like the filthiest animal, and you who have always hated us, you, Jacopo, you who wait only to see us underground, who, when you were little, used to turn your head away when you met us and make a gesture of spitting—and you did spit at us, because I saw you, I remember—it is as if it were yesterday, Jacopo. You, you come to us to say this to me—" Then she gave a sort of strangled cry; it seemed that the words which she was thinking were too enormous and upsetting to come out of her mouth, so that she remained still, her lips half opened, her eyes wide, worn, broken by the deep passion of hatred; she no longer belonged to herself, she was in the throes of a power stronger, higher and darker, in the grip of a powerful and profound night tide on which she and Jacopo were but floating bodies.

"Scoundrels," said the boy firmly, sibilantly. "Scoundrels, you've done nothing but live off our misfortunes, feeding on our troubles. You are like germs that can live only in infected zones. And you go around talking against me and my sister."

"You—you!" said Olimpia, with a complaining irony, raising her forefinger at him. "Ready to become even the henchman of your sister, of your sister who, it may be said, you don't even know, your sister from whom you have always tried to break away since you got the use of your reason. You don't know a single thing about her, she is a perfect stranger to you."

"Scoundrels," said Jacopo stubbornly, attaching himself to this judgment. "Scoundrels, you'll go around talking against us. But I want to tell you this. I want to leave this message for your husband. When he comes back, when he's tired out with weeping over the dead man and breathing the air of misfortune, when he comes back tonight you'll tell him that I came, you'll tell him that I set foot, for the last time, here in this house. And you will tell him that I know all, do you understand? All. I know what kind of people you are. You'll tell him that I know, that I feel, that I am sure as I am of being here, that he hates and that he will talk against us if he isn't stopped in time. He will do it as God exists. I know that the desire doesn't leave him peace, that hatred oozes from all sides. Well, instead, you'll tell him to keep quiet. You'll tell him that I've warned him to shut up. That I was here and told him to quit, to

shut himself up in the house, to wall himself in, not to spread poison about us—”

“Why?” said the woman, like one who feels that she holds all the cards and enjoys waiting to play them. “Why should he talk against you? What’s happened? What have you done?”

“I’m going to choke you, do you understand?” said the boy with a tone of exasperation and bitterness so persuaded, reasoned, and terrible as to make the woman draw back, frightened.

“If you’re afraid that we want to make some remarks about you, it means that you have some reason for expecting these remarks, it means that either you or Malvina feel that you deserve them.”

He seemed ready to leap on the woman. But she withdrew, interposing the heavy walnut door between them, almost slamming it in his face. “That means that you feel you deserve these things,” she repeated, in a high voice; and she closed the door and left Jacopo alone, standing silently on the landing.

From that landing another branch of stairs rose toward the upper story, from which a white, steady light fell. Half way up the steps, Jacopo saw a large cat, crouching immobile. He went up, putting a foot on the step below the cat and the other foot three steps down; he laced his fingers over his up-thrust knee, placing his chin on his hands. He remained thus, staring into the cat’s yellow eyes. At last, guardedly, he stretched his hands toward the cat, seeking the warm fur around the neck, the exact position; then he began to squeeze. First, he met a sensation as though of rubber; then the cat gave a sleepy and petulant meowing; then it jerked away and tried, suddenly, to bite. “Damn you! get out of here!” Jacopo screamed.

And when the cat had run away, he looked at the empty stairs and felt about him a veritable desert.

Then, as he stood there in the enemy house, he remembered the reason for his coming; and at the thought of Giovanna, a sudden relief came over him, as over one who, on waking, realizes that the terror was only a dream. The relatives—they could do nothing. He would marry Giovanna. He felt completely free to do it. He was without duties, he had tried to make his adjustments and had failed, he was free, his life now unfolded on a plan different from the plan of theirs.

As he walked away, he experienced a new, profound pleasure, an attitude of daring. "I'll marry Giovanna," he thought, "and we'll have a great deal of money. After all, didn't I inherit Federico's money? If they hate me, isn't their hatred merely envy? Envy because I was clever. The money came to me because I was subtle enough to get it. Didn't the old man always believe I loved him? And isn't there—isn't there perhaps a special charm in this cleverness of mine?" His old aspirations to a brilliant, carefree social life came back to him; and he saw Giovanna, beautiful, elegant, a splendid ornament by his side. "We shall go to Paris," he thought vaguely; "we'll go there on our honeymoon. Let our relatives try to reach us there!"

When heated, almost swollen in spirit and in his senses by this new thought, he reached the swimming pool, it was already late, and only Giovanna and her friends remained. It seemed as though the vast place, full of that slightly oppressive air, of sonorous echoes and of light reflected whitely on the ceiling, had been left open past closing time only for Giovanna and her friends. They were doing fancy diving, showing off their smartest tricks. Jacopo sat on one of the damp benches, looking now at Giovanna, who was standing on the highest boards, and then at the wet tile floor under his feet. Dick approached him, regarding him with a strange, dulled expression of daring, and said: "Aren't you coming swimming with us?" His voice lingered momentarily, challengingly, on the last word.

Jacopo did not answer.

"Giovanna does not feel well tonight," the man added, as if to fill the silence, like a man who speaks about the weather.

What happened then, occurred with extraordinary rapidity, but, as it seemed to Jacopo, in accord with a rigorous and logical plan. Even as it happened, Jacopo realized that he had foreseen it. He had foreseen it, because, even as he heard Dick's words, he had seen on the face of Giovanna, poised high up among the white lights, that unusual pallor.

The woman, all at once, seemed to fold over, to give way, to loosen. There was something sorrowful, almost imploring in her gesture, in her way of falling, tired, broken. It was as though her body, up to that last moment, had been held by a single tenuous thread of energy. And now that thread had broken. The woman, bent forward, she abandoned herself. If her movement had been

less swift, one might have thought that she bent over merely to scrutinize the water before diving. But instead, everything happened in an instant, and immediately that body was precipitated forward with an unforeseen heaviness, bumping against the edge of the boards as a dead bird bumps against the branch of a tree, and falls, undone, to the grass.

Before Jacopo could become completely aware of the event, the men had already jumped into the water and brought her out. They stretched her out, dripping, on the tile. They passed their hands through her hair, over her forehead; then Dick ordered the other to get a car. They hurried out, silently, and Dick remained alone near the prostrate woman. Jacopo, almost tentatively, approached. "There's blood," he said. "Don't you see, there's blood?"

Dick did not answer him.

Jacopo felt himself grasped by an unexpected indifference. He felt that he could do nothing, that nothing was asked of him. He could not participate in the events unfolding before his eyes; he had not felt any emotion even as they unfolded; he had been able to predict them methodically, with strange lucidity.

The woman revived almost at once. She did not move, merely opening her eyes, calmly, perfectly herself, as if she were measuring herself, her own state of being, her own pain, as if that reasoned motionlessness were the best way of defending herself. Her voice was feeble, but perfectly secure, as her eyes fixed themselves on Dick, who was kneeling by her, holding her pulse. "What's Jacopo doing here?" she demanded. "What does he want?"

Dick rose abruptly, saying, "Perhaps I can find something, some disinfectant or something, in the lockers," and went out by one of the small doors beyond.

Jacopo leaned over her, as Dick had, demanding, "How do you feel? Did you hurt yourself?" his own words sounding so futile and fatuous that he expected no answer.

The woman closed her eyes. "Call Dick," she said. "Tell him not to hunt that stuff. It's more important for him to come here."

"But how do you feel? Where are you hurt?" he insisted. He stared at the blood running down her cheek, a small line of blood which moved slowly, irrelevantly, on the brown skin. "What have you done?" he demanded, and her eyes flickered open for a moment, then closed, and she seemed to withdraw from him, growing hard

and inaccessible. "Where were you last night? Where did you stay? Were you drinking with those people?" But as his words poured out her taut face did not move. There was more contempt than anything else in the fold of her lips. "Why did you come here, when you're tired like this?" Then, into his voice a sort of desperate sweetness entered: "Why don't you talk to me? Why don't you stop living like this, and come away with me?"

"Call Dick," the woman repeated, feebly.

"Come away with me," Jacopo said.

"Why do you bother with me?" she demanded with sudden vigor, opening her eyes, moving as though trying to rise, as though she would spend in this necessary explanation what little energy she had left. "Why don't you think of yourself, why do you want to suffer with me? Go to your sister. She came to see me again about you. Why don't you go to her?" Suddenly, she succumbed as to a great fatigue accumulated in her, falling back on the tile. "What are you doing here?" she cried out. "My God, you don't think you're helping me! Call Dick."

Motionless, inevitably attracted by that streak of blood on her face, Jacopo said, "It may be dangerous. He ought to get the disinfectant. An infection might come."

"For God's sake, go away," she screamed, with whatever strength she had left. "You have nothing but fear!"

In that moment Dick, tall, still wet, appeared at the little door beyond. Jacopo approached him, like a young lieutenant in front of an indifferent general. "Did you find anything?" Jacopo asked. "You've got to do something, bandage her."

"Be patient," Dick said, with formality, looking at Jacopo with curiosity. "The others will get the car and we'll take her to my place."

"But why don't you do something? By God, why don't you?"

"Be quiet," Dick said softly, but with a hint of mockery in his tone. "Don't bother me, please." Then he measured the boy with his glance, saying, "My medicine doesn't do me much good now. My hands tremble so much I don't believe I could even fix a bandage." He looked at his hands with a technical curiosity. Then he spoke with a thick, calm subdued voice, the voice of one who gives a challenge that he feels won in advance. "I'm rather drunk," he

said, as if in making that confession he confided a secret which Jacopo was not worthy to have.

Quickly, not without indignation, the boy detached himself and went toward Giovanna. The woman's eyes were closed, she was perfectly motionless. He bent over her without finding the strength to speak. It was she who broke the long silence: "Call Dick," she said, with a sigh. "Where is he? Call him. Tell him to come here."

Dick was still at the door beyond. He waited for Jacopo to come near. He waited, as it were, to have him within reach. Then he looked at him, seeming to measure the distance between them. Speaking, he was so aware of his own superiority that he didn't even adopt a tone of contempt, but a good-hearted, ready air. "Do you know what I would advise you?" he said. "I would advise you to go. Why don't you go?" He had the accent of one who gives disinterested advice, a persuasive accent, that seemed to mean: "Believe me, there are some serious possibilities in my plan."

"Then you'll take care of Giovanna," said the boy with a forced and completely ineffectual dignity. The other nodded, smiling. Jacopo stopped an instant before the woman. She was pale, rigid, absolutely impenetrable to word or gesture. The boy went out without saying anything further.

It seemed to him, in the street, that a great catastrophe had occurred silently. And suddenly there came to him the thought of his sister. Perhaps this thought came to him because the terms of his catastrophe were shapeless, mute, because he could not find words to express them. And a conversation with his sister, on the other hand, might help to define, to give him freedom. Suddenly he became aware of how seldom he set foot in Malvina's house. She had come quite often to pay calls that he had not returned. I never go to anybody's house, he thought. Aside from visits to Federico, the only family visit of a certain importance that he had paid recently was the disastrous visit to the Breas. What's happened to us? he thought. What's happened to our family? Meanwhile he got on a streetcar and while these thoughts occupied him, he was surprised and obsessed by an impression that was being roused in him unwittingly and from which till now there came only discomfort. Then he became aware that he was annoyed by the streets that he

saw about him. It was like being involved always more in unexpected and unknown territory. He had never noticed the places that he was passing, he hadn't noticed that the section where his sister lived was so poor. Then he found her house, the worn door, the long list of bells, the doorkeeper's garish room, with a yellowish light.

Big, her face red, a large cat on her knees, the doorkeeper looked at him with curiosity: "Not really?" she said. "You are not really her brother?"

"Yes," said Jacopo, "and can you tell me where I can find her?" He pronounced these words with fear. He felt that there must be occupations of his sister unknown to him, and among which he figured like an intruder. The doorkeeper told him to return the next day. She made an exact appointment.

With the same precision, direct, perfectly normal in her well-cut but shiny dress and her green look in extending her hand, Malvina appeared to him the next day. She told him to sit down, and with a familiar movement, raising her chin toward him, she asked him what he wanted.

"What have you done?" said Jacopo. "I mean this: How responsible are you for Giovanna's attitude toward me? What did you tell her?"

"Nothing more than you already know," said the woman coldly. "Why?"

"I have the impression that everything is finished between Giovanna and me," he said, "and I wanted to know."

"But this," the sister interrupted, "represents nothing special, it had to happen some time or other, and it's happened, but potentially the fact always existed. The day when it happened is not in reality more important than any other." Jacopo was quiet. He seemed afraid to hate her. "Do you understand?" asked the woman. "Do you understand my idea?"

"Yesterday," he started saying with a need to attach himself, almost defensively, to concrete facts, "yesterday she hurt herself in falling from one of the highest diving boards. I think she hurt herself a great deal. She was bleeding, and Dick and the others were there. And I saw her so pale, and I told her, I almost begged her: 'Come with me.' But then, suddenly, just then, I saw it was all a mistake, a hopeless thing." Why precisely yesterday? he asked

himself. Already worn with fatigue by a life that he did not know, the woman had fallen, wounding herself. Like a bird's wing brushing a twig, the probability of death had appeared. "If for example, let us suppose, she is in danger, then she turns away from me," he said. Malvina listened in silence. "She looks down on me," finally he continued, "she looks down on a normal life, on the morality of a family like ours. It is your fault, your fault especially. She looks down on all of us, you hate her, you are almost ashamed for me to go with her because she lived away from her husband before he died, because they even said she had an illegitimate son, because they say that at night she gets drunk in houses, or in dancing establishments."

Suddenly on Malvina's face there came a new and very strange expression. It was something between sarcasm, terror, hilarity, and an extreme, almost maddened wonder. She waited awhile before opening her mouth as if she herself were preparing to listen with surprise to her own words: "I don't know about Giovanna, but I—I have an illegitimate son," she said, looking at her brother while her whole face was so gay, tense, and surprised that it seemed to shine. "I have a son, my son. He's seven years old, Jacopo. Did you know that?"

"What do you mean?" he said after the brief silence. It seemed as if the color were drained from her eyes. Then there was a much longer silence. The clock ticked on the wall.

Then, irate, unreasonable, he said: "Seven years, even before our father died." In his pale face there was the senseless expression of a person who doesn't understand his own words. "You're a fool," he said, "you're a fool. Why did you do it?" But as soon as he thought about his words, their weight diminished and disappeared. An entirely different world rose before him. It was impossible to be amazed at his sister's revelation. "It is strange," he said, with a quiet, offensive bitterness, "it is strange how this news does not surprise me. The fact that you had a child secretly doesn't seem at all extraordinary. In fact, now that you've told me, now that I know, Malvina, it really seems that I've always known it." The woman looked at him and did not seem to hear him. "There's always been something incomprehensible in you," he continued, "incomprehensible, and ugly, something that I've always felt, when you were little." But the woman did not seem to hear these words. She

sat there in her unmoving and indifferent calm. When he became quiet she kept looking at him with that curiosity of hers mixed with slight revulsion. He remembered her in her strange childish games. He remembered her intent on seeking dangers, with ease and almost with an assured melancholy, as if she felt herself condemned to a bad destiny. He remembered her in her shrewdness, in her strange interest in death. She stretched out in muddy hiding places of the garden without caring about dirtying her dress and body, as she lay in wait for small beasts. She had always liked to do strange, secret things that were sad.

Now she looked at him, unaware of her words, with her mind fixed on a fascinating and horrible thought. Her eyes had become clear, her voice contracted in an expression of spasm: "And he's sick," she said with infinite desolation. "He's been sick, Jacopo, and now winter is about to come. He's pale, he needs warmth, care, it is a dangerous age, I think there's a sort of crisis that he must pass. His eyes are fatigued, he needs strengthening, he needs good food, to be kept with great care."

"He's sick," repeated Jacopo with a low voice and in an absent tone. For the first time the concrete image of the little one was evoked between them. Till a moment ago he had ignored the existence; now there he was present before him, new, and already heavy with pain. "He will die," Jacopo said, almost despite himself; "he's very pale, he's frail, isn't that so? It is a dangerous age. He will die." He had spoken these words as if out loud to himself.

The sister looked at him: "I always knew you're an egotist," she said. "I've had reasons to see it so many times, day by day, throughout all these years. Your egotism for me is like a household object, like an object one sees every day, like the dining-room table, like the kitchen door. Do you understand me, Jacopo? And why do you think I told you about the child? Do you think that I wanted to ask you for help? Do you think that I brought it up to ask you for money?"

The sister's dress was shiny, her gloves dirty, her shoes worn. What was new in her, as usual, was only the astute rigidity of her face, her rich blond hair, her dark green eyes. She was miserably poor, and she was also worthy of contempt. Still, she was proud of it. She should have been frightened. She should have trembled before the image of a sick and suffering child, finally dying because

of cold and stinting. Nevertheless, she was not afraid, she was rigid, sure of herself, in the posture of one ready to fight. Before accusations she tightened her lips, and answered with contempt. She was sure of herself, and defied others. She was full of pride. She's like Giovanna, he thought with astonishment, the same way of looking, the same courage, she's like Giovanna. He bent over her, speaking in a whisper:

"And if he dies?" he asked.

The woman's face became more rigid; she closed her eyes without answering.

"And if he dies?" he repeated.

The woman did not speak. She withdrew into herself, like a wounded person who refuses useless help. In the dark of her look, behind her lowered lids, she contemplated the thought of that death, something that belonged to herself alone, not to her brother.

And he remembered the night at the pool, a white face marked with blood, himself saying: "An infection might come." Closed, secret eyes, like a thick door, denying him the vision of prohibited events, once again excluded him, pushed him away, eliminated him. It was as if he had been turned out, blackballed by an exclusive circle of people. But the child could get well, he thought suddenly. And he seemed to see him, getting out of bed after the illness, grown taller the way children do after fever, with a detached, unapproachable, and fleeting expression in his eyes.

And why doesn't she ask me to help her? he thought with despair. Why shouldn't she ask me for money? His sister, her face, the form of her body, appeared before him as a habitual, inevitable thing to which he had already been attached for too long a time. All her life was present before him. Now he knew also that her body had known the supreme pleasure, those green eyes had known tears of enjoyment. He remembered her in the first years of youth, growing in their house, becoming an incomprehensible and attractive girl, with her long blond hair, her flesh becoming alive and sensual, her air secret and avid. Why wasn't I aware of all this? Why didn't I know her better? he thought. And slowly, as remembrances emerged, he felt himself clutched. A habitual and persuasive power mastered him, mixed with pity for the child given to light through pain, raised through a continuous suffering. He looked at his sister and became aware that he was dragged toward loving her as one time

he had been led to following her always and in everything. He loved her with a firmness that was more profound than anything else, with a force that was too natural to be overcome.

"How was it?" he asked. "How did it happen. Whose son is he?"

At once the woman named one of their common friends who had died some time back.

"It happened that time when you and father went hunting alone," she added, "and you returned two days late. It was Sunday, do you remember now? It was Sunday night, and he came as a guest, he was invited, and I was left alone to receive him. I had already thought of what might happen. It was as if I had known it for some time. I was very young. He was several years older than I. Yet this had nothing to do with it. I knew him better than I knew I knew any of you. Afterwards, I have never had a single moment of real unhappiness. You have never known anything. Few have known anything. Telling you a short while ago, and listening to your first words, I looked down on you. I was wrong, I guess. There's something that you can't avoid, and it is the fact that we are brother and sister, that there are so many things that tie us. You know that? Because you see, even if you didn't know it, it would be true just the same. You can't do anything. It's beyond you. It is a real, inevitable thing. Do you understand, Jacopo?"

"Why don't you ask me for help?" he said. "Why can't I help you?" He put forth his offer like the only thing that in his life could still have significance. He was aware that all his existence had been a mistake. He saw his years in the family, and his years of school, and his years in search of a career, all marked with errors which he had inherited from others, and in which he had never believed. He had followed to the letter laws that had never persuaded him. The only thing he could do with his memories was to repudiate them. He had believed in others, who had deceived him. So he had ruined many things in his life, deserted many hopes; finally he had given up Giovanna. He had trusted in his sister without knowing exactly what she was like. Now his single conceivable vengeance could have been that of letting the child die. Instead he looked at her with expectation, almost imploring her to ask for help.

And he thought again of that faraway evening in which he was going with his father across distant valleys toward a hut where they

would spend the night so as to be ready in the morning for the hunt. Meanwhile, in the villa, his sister received the guest, making him rest by the fire. If he and the father had returned at that time, she would not have recognized them. It was night, night as when Giovanna dived into the pool, wounding her face, and allied herself to her friends, repulsing him. They were stretched out by the fire, Malvina and the guest. Meanwhile, far away in the country, Jacopo and his father were drawing close to the hut, they fumbled for the keyhole, they lit the candle. They exchanged few words. He saw his father again, intent in preparing the straw for the night and lighting the fire of that same fireplace that would cook the food the next day. Jacopo saw again their tall shadows playing on the walls of the hut and the thin reddish beard of his father on which the reflections of the flames trembled. Then they stretched out, wishing each other good night. He felt the smell of the damp boards, of the humid wool. It was the end of autumn. The season of snows was not far away. The wind was sibilant under the wooden door of the hut. Tranquil, warm in the wool, Jacopo, almost a child then, felt himself well protected next to that tall, strong father, whom he had always respected in silence without understanding. He had always accepted his words without discussion. He had followed his orders without really knowing him. Toward death, his room had been closed to him.

"Finally, it is only logical that I never should have known about it," said the boy with infinite pain. "What dealings ever existed between my family and me? Did you ever think of this, Malvina? Who have I ever known? The only one, perhaps, was Federico, and I knew him in order to betray him, in order to steal from him."

The woman did not speak; she looked at the pattern on the rug.

"That money, Malvina, that damned money— Why mine? Why should I keep it?"

The woman's fists were clenched. He felt that in those years she must have awakened at night, she must have thought with fright of days to come, of the mortal pallor of the child, of the coming of cold seasons.

"Take it," he broke forth, "it's your money too, take it, it is right. I don't know how much you will want, but you see, you ought to take it all. And don't think that this is enough. Don't think this

will save me from this horror. That's all you can do. That's all we can do at this moment. Think that it is only in order to protect the child. Think that at least it can save him."

"Save him," repeated the woman.

"Don't think that it is enough," said Jacopo, "but it is all that can be done, all that I can ask you. Take it away from me. Take that damned money. Not that this will be enough to cure me. To be free from that stuff saves me from the worst. It will only be a temporary arrangement. But you see, the rest will remain, like an illness. You take away nothing but the fever."

"What are you saying? What are you saying, Jacopo?" repeated the woman two or three times.

"Like an illness," he went on, "it's in the blood. Egotism, the love of money, hatred. Perhaps I hate the Breas because I am like them. All attached to our own interest, ready to strike each other in treachery. The only difference is that when there's misfortune in the family they come about like flies, it seems that they feel a tremendous pleasure in death, while I still have a certain restraint, a certain respect. But why? Because I am afraid. I am afraid of death. Because you see, even now, if for example your child died, I would be afraid."

"Why?" said the woman, rising, very tall, absent, "why do you say this? What do these things mean?"

"And Federico's death was the worst thing of all, the most terrible. Because you see, he left me that money because I was lying in wait while he was dying, I betrayed him while he was dying. And now I have the money here, I have it on me like an infection. It is worse than any other death, because here there has remained a concrete sign, that money seems to have a face, a face that looks at me. You'll take it away, won't you? You said we couldn't help being brother and sister and I hope then that you will do the little I ask of you, Malvina. You are the only one who can take that money without being afraid." They were the only ones, she and the child, immune to the seizure of avarice, to domestic falsity. "Pretend that it is your father telling you to take it. You always obeyed our father. Make believe it is he. It is family money. All the old people accumulated it with the passing years."

And now he thought once more of the laboring and unfortunate ones who had accumulated that wealth. Of their yellow photo-

graphs, on thick mountings, forgotten in drawers. Of their deserted rooms, searched by the relatives like crows. He saw once more those dead in his family, he saw Federico plunged in the armchair, his eyes clear and fixed on remembrances of the sea. He remembered his father's hand resting on his shoulder; the huts in the mountains; he saw him bent over stirring the fire, the flame reflected in the reddish beard. "It is right, Malvina," he murmured; "it is your money too, rest assured, it is right."

It was right, right that domestic things should be adjusted thus, that the patrimonial axis should be arranged in that manner. It was right that in Malvina the cold fear of years past could be finally dissolved, and that a child should have someone to think of his bed, fire, and food, while snow came, and the wind came whistling at the sill.

THE HONEY HOUSE

Mary King

HE CAME into her line of vision walking backward, easing himself around the young hackberry and pecan saplings in the overgrown path with his hands stretched out behind him. When he drew even with where she squatted in the blackberry vines, her gathered apron careful with turkey eggs, her hand reached into the nest to transfer another, she saw that he was laughing. His brown face was split in the middle over his teeth and creased about his eyes in profound and soundless mirth. The idiot, she thought, I wonder what he's been up to.

"Look out!" she said aloud. "You'll hang up on the berry vines."

With his heels planted on the path the way they had been going, the man swung his body on his hips and looked at her. He wasn't so young as she had first thought, seeing him from behind and then in profile: he was almost old. She dropped her eyes and completed the gesture interrupted when she had caught sight of him, lifting the egg her fingers had been circling and placing it in her apron with the others. His eyes traveled down her to the nest.

"Turkeys are no good here, they go wild," he said.

"I'm doin' all right."

"Looks that way. Hidin' out on you. They'll do it every time. You must have come a good piece . . . no house short of two miles." He drew a sack of tobacco from his shirt pocket and rolled a cigarette with awkward and expert fingers.

"I came quite a way," she admitted. "What were you laughin' at, backin' down the path like that, laughin' all to yourself?"

"Oh, that! . . . oh nothin' much." He was laughing again.

Crouched beside him on the path, she looked up curiously into his changed face. Smoke slid from the end of his cigarette and

vanished between them. The frown and the question slipped from her face, and she laughed with him.

"This is my land," he said.

"I judged it was."

"I've never seen you around here before."

"I've never seen you either." She stood up, wanting her words to seem final, yet half afraid that he would take them so. At her full height she was as tall as he, and broader. He was narrow and light-moving, a quick man among trees. She didn't mind being caught trespassing on his land.

"That's different," he was saying, "everybody knows me."

"I don't. I never laid eyes on you before. You might be Adam and I wouldn't know."

"You'll know me if you live around here. You like my land all right."

"That ain't my fault. Turkeys are aimless creatures. A fence means nothin' to a turkey."

"Where do you live?" He looked at her shrewdly, noting with approval her deep body and strong hands, the lines in her fresh-colored face.

"Through the woods a piece," she answered. "At the bridge turn-off on the bayou road. Me and my husband just took the place."

"If you just took it, why has your turkey hen laid a nestful of eggs? She must be a quick one."

"You're kind of quick yourself. The turkeys came with the place. We're from Sudan, in the next county. Thought we'd try farming for a while. Searls did. I don't care."

"I know your land, I used to own it. I sold it for taxes . . . stump land . . . what have you planted?"

"Cotton, some corn."

"You won't get far without niggers. Nigger work, stump land is. No white man's job."

"I guess you got niggers to do your work? I guess you don't turn a hand yourself?" She eyed his faded blue shirt and khaki pants, both molded to him from much wear, and bulging at the pockets as a man's clothes do when they are put on from the clothes-line without pressing. She was half turned from him now, speaking over her shoulder in the way of one who should go and yet liked the

sound of voices in the quiet place where she had not expected to find them, and found pleasant the consideration of her words by this man whose sudden presence had called them forth.

While speaking of the land his face had been sober, but now it creased again into laughter and she knew that this was what she had been lingering to see. "I got niggers or they got me, whichever way you look at it," he said. "Why don't you come see my place? It's only a little piece through the woods, closer than yours by a good three-quarter mile. Come, and I'll give you a drink before you walk back."

"The eggs'll get cold. I want to set them under a hen while they're still warm . . . I'd like a drink, though . . . I've been real thirsty for a long time."

He looked at the eggs gathered close to her body. "They'll keep warm. I'd like you to come."

He stooped and swept the vines away from the path, and she, drawn forward by the motion of his arm, stepped up beside him through the gate he had opened.

"All right, I'll come. I guess there's time."

When the path narrowed he walked ahead, holding the branches back for her. She followed dreamily, glad for an excuse to prolong her quiet walking in the open. It was not often she got away from the house for this long, on an errand that did not carry with its consummation a definite hour of return. Since dinnertime she had been searching, and by the sun it was now well past four. It was not often she got away from Searls for this long either. Heavy and cumbersome, he usually trod in time with her thoughts even when he did not accompany her in person. But she had shed him somewhere back among the trees during her hours of lonely hunting, and now, even though she was a little tired, she felt herself following lightly in the narrow tracks of the man ahead, bending aside to avoid a tree when he bent aside, stooping when he stooped under a low branch, her body adapting itself unconsciously to his swinging motion.

Half drunk on sunlight, her lids lowered over her eyes, she followed him. The way was farther than she had thought it would be, or maybe it seemed far because the sight of no familiar landmarks clocked the light monotony of her passage.

As she walked forward, her thoughts doubled and retraced their

way to the turkey nest in the briars and to her first sight of the man's back, repossessing the time and place of meeting. By the time they returned to her the blue and brown figure ahead was clothed in long familiarity. Her eyes, rejecting the strangeness of her surroundings, accepted him from the alert back of his head to his run-down heels as her feet accepted without question or hesitation the uneven turnings of the path.

He strode ahead, drawing her along behind him in a wake of rustling foliage. She wondered amusedly what he carried in his hip pocket. One side of his flat buttocks bulged in a grotesque caricature of a woman's swaying hip. Probably an extra packet of tobacco and a bandana handkerchief, she thought.

They passed through the young growth into taller trees less choked with underbrush, the land looking as if it might have been cleared at one time, and he dropped back and walked beside her. She evened her steps in care for the eggs in her apron, and now it was he who suited his stride to the shorter and more cautious rhythm of her motion. The land sank away toward a point she knew must be the river for its color changed, glowing a deep red through the scratchy covering.

They stepped into the furrows of a cornfield. The man raised his hand in silent greeting to the plowing negro who stopped his mule, removed his hat, and remained motionless, staring after them. She saw a cabin off to one side of the clearing, and from this point also felt herself observed, although a quick glance revealed nothing at the window but pink curtains looped back upon a shadowy interior, and strung across the door, a tattered sheet that swung gently outward in a draft.

"There's my house," he said. He stopped on the edge of the field and surveyed the scene before him, and there was that about him which let her know that he had stood on just this spot many times before, labeling all he saw with passive irony. She had a feeling that if she had come on this scene by herself her eyes would have passed over it, that the man beside her alone had power to call it into visibility, himself being the core of the picture, and the rest taking shape from his regard.

She saw a big ruined house on a knoll beside the river. Around the house, partly hiding it, grew a grove of moss-hung live oaks. The trees were enormous, both the living and the dead, and their shadow

spread a contagion of darkness upon the bare ground around the encircled house. The house itself was like a picture of a house that children draw, all lines from a solid base leaning obliquely toward the river, as a deaf man might lean to listen with a hand cupped to his ear. From the look of the outside she knew that the sound of a footstep in a lower room would echo to the attic, and that a man living alone in it must hear the reflection of his presence thrown back at him from all sides, must live day after day surrounded by the sound of his own coming and going.

"I know now who you are," she said. "You're Andrew Taboney. I heard about you."

"And who are you?"

"I'm Ellen Dick."

He led the way up the path, across the porch, and into the wide hall that ran the depth of the house and showed her, at the end of it, the cut bank of a bayou grown over with elders in white bloom. They stood just inside the door, she, holding the apronful of eggs, blinking her sun-filled eyes in the unaccustomed dimness, smelling the musty fragrance of old wood, and nearer, the bright bitter odor of the man himself.

"Listen!" he said.

As the outside sounds dropped away she became aware of a low humming, a soft monotonous droning that seemed to come from all around her.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Bees."

"In the house? Where do you keep them?"

"I don't. They keep themselves. They're in the walls."

"Millions, they sound like. How did they get in? Don't they bother you, don't they ever sting?"

"Through the weatherboarding, cracks around the chimney, through the front door here—it's seldom closed. No, they don't sting. Just make honey."

"Well! So you could live on honey!"

"I don't disturb it. Why should I? I've plenty to eat."

"Oh, I don't know. Seems funny, that's all . . . all that honey right here in your walls, a regular honeycomb, and you not touchin' it."

"Any woman would say the same."

He walked ahead of her through the hall and out to a pump in the back yard. He kicked a box and motioned her toward it.

"Sit down while I pump the water cool."

The eggs had grown a burdensome weight. Supporting her apron with a hand, she eased herself down upon the box and looked around her. Chickens scratched in a wire-enclosed yard. In a skimpy garden weeds and vegetables fought silently. The elder-grown bayou was behind her; from it sounded the working hum of bees. Here, then, was where most of the honey came from. Elder flower honey. On one side of the clearing the woods came close; on the other side ran the river, with woods beginning again on its far bank. The place was peaceful and desolate in the late afternoon sunlight, disturbed only by the sound of bees and the rasping strokes of the pump.

Her eyes closed sleepily, shutting out all except the slender arc of the man's body curving up and down over the pump handle, his blue shirt bright against the green beyond. She felt tired and heavy, as if she would like never to move again, as if all the steps she had ever taken had been leading her toward this spot and now she was content to sit and rest without thinking. She wished vaguely for an answering quiet in the man, but now he was rinsing a tin cup, filling it, and bringing it to her. He stood over her, offering the cool water, and she took the cup and tilted it to her mouth.

"It's quiet here," she sighed, when she had finished drinking.

"You're tired. Why don't you put those eggs down and rest a while. They'll keep warm in the sun."

"No. I guess not."

"I've got a broody hen. We'll put 'em under her and they'll be all right. Come, stand up! Then you can rest."

Suddenly wide awake Ellen rose to her feet. She searched the man's eyes intently for a moment, and then spoke, setting her words down softly and carefully to bridge the silence between them, a way held open for retreat.

"She won't take them. They're strange, not her own."

"Don't worry."

Without waiting for her reply he strode to the chicken yard and unlatched the gate. His voice came to her muffled from his head lowered over a coop. "There's plenty room. Just bring 'em here."

She came and stood beside him. She passed the eggs to him one at a time and he, taking them, pushed them gently under the hen.

The hen drove her beak at his hand; then, swelling her warm feathers, accepted the eggs and settled into her former position—finality, completion in the closing down of her wings. The woman's lids drooped. She watched the man dreamily, noting the sure way his hands moved about the box, drawing the sliding door half shut again, setting a pan of water within reach. He straightened up and wiped his hands down the front of his thighs.

"You got a handkerchief in your pocket," she said.

"You know, don't you?"

"Yeah."

He pulled the blue bandana from his hip pocket and passed it over his face.

"You're a handy man. Not many men could touch a settin' hen without throwin' her into fits."

He laughed. He came close to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "You're a good woman, Ellen, I saw that right away. A good woman for a man to have, a smart woman. Your turkeys would do better here."

"What made you laugh? I been studyin' what could make you laugh like I seen you laughin' back yonder in the woods."

His body was hard and inquisitive. As it had happened on the path in the woods, she found herself laughing with him.

"What a strange man you are!" she said. "And you got silver in your pockets, I hear it jingle . . . walkin' through the woods backwards, laughin', with silver on your leg . . . I'll stay."

On the second morning Andrew left the house early with his gun. Ellen worked for a while in the garden, pulling the grass away from young carrots and beets, and when the sun began to burn her back, she crept under the elders on the bayou bank to rest.

"Hello! Hello! Anybody home?" The voice roused her and she sat up. Searls was standing at the back door of the house.

"Here!" she answered, and he came toward her, walking through the garden.

"Ellen, I been worried sick! What're you doin' here? I been searchin' the woods, thought you was lost."

"I been all right, safe enough. I like it here."

"This is Andrew Taboney's place, ain't it? I haven't told any-

body, nobody knows you been gone. What made you run away? These woods're full of niggers. But nobody knows you been gone."

"As for niggers, I seen maybe two or three. They tend to their business and I tend to mine."

"God knows, it's a forsaken place," he said, "away off from anywheres." His head turned to follow the steady flight of bees between elders and house. A bee, heavy with nectar, clung to his leg, and he beat it off with his hat. "Where all these bees come from?"

"The house. They live in the house, in the walls."

"I hear them." He looked at her with his brows drawn together, unable to find her familiar in her new surroundings. She had always been a busy woman, and here it was high morning and she was not only idle but sleepy, lying in the sun of a strange man's garden, leaving all work to the bees.

"Where's Taboney?"

"It's a pleasant sound . . . I never seen so many bees before."

"Ellen, is this a way to do me? Come on back and I'll forget about it. I know crazy things come into a woman's head at times and she acts without cause. We'll just forget about it, and you come on home with me. I can't handle all the work myself. The corn we planted needs choppin', and who'll tend the turkeys?"

He was not angry, she saw, only hurt and puzzled. He stood before her looking humbly on the ground, slapping his leg with his doubled up hat. His pleading voice changed her pity to contempt. Her eyes picked the square of neat stitches in the knee of his overalls. Often she had wished that she need not patch his pants, for it seemed to her that she patched his dignity instead. Going or coming, she had fenced his tatters even from her own eyes, yet all her protection had not served to hold him up. Guarded, he still drooped. His heavy shoulders hung slack. His legs bent at the knees. She thought of Andrew's straight back.

"Go on home, Searls," she said. "You had your time. You gave me nothin' but work, a heavy weight on me day and night. It's peaceful here. You go on home. Maybe I'll come back some day."

"Ellen. . . ."

"Go on home. You got no cause to be here."

"Well," he sighed, "if your mind's made up it won't do me any good to see Taboney, no good I can see. I don't want a fight. I'm a

peaceful man, and much as I hate to see you here I won't fight about it. You come on home when you get ready. I guess it'll be the same with me."

"All right," she said contemptuously. She watched him off through the trees. Coming toward a woman a man might stoop, might bend forward with his hands before him, feeling his way—but not leaving a woman. When a man left a woman his back should be straight.

That night she told Andrew of the visit and they laughed together. "What makes you hate him so?" Andrew asked curiously.

"I don't hate him, he just tires me, he's hard to move around. I mean I always felt him heavy on my mind, hard to push around, like. Oh, I don't know. Bein' around him was like bein' out somewheres with an umbrella you started out carryin', thinkin' it would rain, and then it turned off not to rain, and me with a big heavy umbrella and no place to lay it down. There was just no gettin' rid of him till I came away. . . . That was it."

"And I'm a little man so I don't bother you? You can just forget all about me? I don't weigh on you, so you like me? Is that it?"

The room was warm and quiet. Through the open hall door the low moon poked a finger of light across the worn boards of the inner threshold. From the woods an owl spoke.

"You ain't here at all," she answered. "You're somewhere else, I don't know where. What makes you laugh so much, over nothin' I can see . . . but I like it. What made you laugh back there in the woods that day? I'd give a lot to know."

Life in the new place settled evenly about Ellen's shoulders through the days that followed, and she gave herself up to the release of complete concealment. She had lived always in towns, within call of neighbors, her thoughts pushed this way and that by currents from passing vehicles and voices. Now, for the first time in her life, she knew quietness. The sun, the droning bees, the man, Andrew Taboney, moving lightly in his direct yet aimless fashion, all conspired to put a kind of sleep upon her. For a time, it is true, the presence of the bees in the house annoyed her with a sense of unfitness. Her fancy, piercing the walls, saw them weaving in insolent clusters that dared her broom. But soon she came to think

differently. The unending hum of the bees' labor soothed her as no complete silence could have done.

No road ran past the house. The trails that wound to and from the negro cabins—and she had come to find that there were a dozen or so of these scattered along the river bank, each in its small clearing of field and garden—served only to deepen her sense of isolation. Any trouble which might have found its way to her through the labyrinth of footpaths, the trees by the house themselves deflected, so that she woke and drowsed and slept at the very core of a humming quiet.

Day after day this quiet was broken only by the rattle of trace chains as Francis worked the corn near the house, the thud of mule's feet down the furrows, the crow calls, and the rustling sound of leaves. The soft voices of the negroes she sometimes heard, but she saw none of them close except Francis. The woman called Weezie, who was his wife, kept well out of sight. There was a child in the cabin too, she learned, but she never saw him except at a distance, following Francis in the field.

Except for the two rooms in which she and Andrew lived, the big house was bare and empty. There was little work for her to do after the cooking of meals and washing of dishes was over. Andrew sent Francis to town for the things she needed, and she seldom thought of her own house or of Searls. Sometimes Andrew went off with his gun alone in the woods, sometimes he took her with him. Or again, he might work for a day or two in the field helping Francis, or with her in the garden.

At one end of the garden, on the bank of the bayou, was a hidden place under the elders where they often lay together. At such times, while her hands searched his hard body to find the soft places, she puzzled over this ability of his to forget work for play. Alone, or with Searls, she would not have dared to leave work unfinished once she had begun it. At first, even with Andrew, she had been prodded by the guilty remembrance of tasks dropped before their completion. But after a while she came to accept his haphazard way of living as she had accepted the industry of the bees—the one seeming to complement the other—and the unaccountable partitions of their days made time seem longer and more richly colored. By evening, often she could not remember what she had done in the morning,

the morning seemed so far away. And this fact also served her for concealment. If she could not retrace her steps to the beginning of the day just passed, how could she be expected to find her way back through the many days that had intervened since she had followed Andrew down the path from the turkey nest, or remember the uneven windings of the path itself, on past the turkey nest and back to Searls? These vague thoughts came and went in her mind as she drew her hiding more closely about her.

The turkey eggs hatched. She counted fourteen. The hen did not lead them to the woods as a turkey mother might have done, but kept them close about the yard and garden where they thrived unmolested. She tended them with pleasure.

Often she would coax Andrew to talk about himself, watching his face intently for the clue to his laughter which his words never gave her. She learned that his family was an old one, house and lands coming to him through his grandfather, whose father had come to Texas from Virginia long before the war between the states and hollowed out his plantation from the rich river-bottom land. Yes, there had been other plantations along the river, but they had gone back to woods. Yes, these negroes were the descendants of his grandfather's slaves. He, Andrew, gave them the land. It was really theirs anyhow. They paid no rent. He had been away to school. He had joined the army and gone to France. When the war was over he had come home. No, he had never married. Why should he? Yes, he owned much land; he was land-poor. Some of the land along the road he had sold, most of it nobody would buy. But it was quiet here, with not too many worries. Country negroes were a peaceful people for the most part, easy to get along with. He was content, his own master, his time belonging to no man except himself.

" . . . to no woman either," he said. They were lying under the elders. She leaned on one elbow and studied his face, what part of it she could see under his upflung arm, and wondered if any woman had ever owned his time.

As always, when she saw his face unmoved by the quick changes given it by laughter, she was struck by its age. He could hardly be much older than herself, yet now, looking down on him, he seemed years older. Suddenly, she knew that she wanted him to be old, would be glad if he never laughed again. Old, he seemed forlorn; his life, shaped by no purpose, utterly wasted. A man needing a woman. •

Looking at his few dusty fowls, his shell of a house, his ill-tended garden, all exposed for what they were in the pitiless sunshine, she tried to conjure up some way of thought by which he and all he owned should not seem wasted, and she could think of nothing to absolve him except her own forbearance. In quick pity and tenderness she bent down and kissed his cheek.

He uncovered his face and looked at her with blue mocking eyes, then crooked his elbow about her neck and drew her down beside him, ruffling her hair with his free hand.

"You're good, Ellen, good and quiet, good to have. Better than any white woman I ever had." Laughter was beginning to curl around his eyes.

"No!" she said sharply, pulling away from him. "Don't! You're always laughin' at me."

But he was bending over her, laughing into her face. "You want my time, Ellen? You got all my time now. What more do you want?"

Transformed by one of his quick changes, he was completely strange to her. About his whole body when he moved was a nameless quality she knew despairingly would never be old. Even as she drew him to her she was deeply and resentfully aware of her own face no longer young, of her own thick body which had once been as slender as his.

She shut her eyes against the sunlight.

The young turkeys shed their baby fluff and grew long-legged and rangy. The hen had a hard time keeping up with them. They left the hen and took to the woods. Ellen did not want to lose one of the fourteen, and so she searched for them and drove them home. They came to know the sound of her voice.

In the evenings Ellen and Andrew bathed by the pump in the back yard. Seeing the man white in the lamplight from the window, she knew that the years had done him a service. The years had pared him thin, concentrating him in the narrowing enclosure of his body until the very concentration seemed a purpose of itself, needing no utterance beyond the speaking line of shoulder and hip as he moved. He was as aloof and intent within himself as some hard clean animal; and she, conscious of the soft spreading of her own body, was again resentful that in her very nature she should seem to reach, he to

withdraw. And she knew that she was always reaching, always striving to find her way to the mysterious source of his youth from which his laughter came. Her first curiosity, lulled to sleep for a time, awoke strengthened into hunger. The man had a secret she was taut with desire to discover and possess. Sometimes she thought his laughter came from her, and was pleased even in her resentment at being thus fed upon; and then she would remember that she had seen his laughter before he had laid eyes upon her, and would be more baffled than before.

The elder flowers dropped away. The succulent stalks hardened in the August heat and stood up to bear their seed, and then wilted quietly down over their roots, their strength retreating underground to wait out the winter.

The coming of fall caught Ellen unaware. One morning she stepped outdoors and crunched an acorn underfoot. Overnight, a great hand had shaken the oaks. All around her the ground was heaped with small hard round bodies, brown and shining, tipped with yellow at the butt. Dead bees, they looked like. And then she realized that the humming in the walls of the house had fallen away. The bees were quieting down for winter.

The next day a cold rain kept the man and the woman indoors. For a while they slept, curled together in bed. In the afternoon Andrew dressed and wandered restlessly about the house. His footsteps echoed in the silence. Watching him, she partook of his restlessness. He moved much, yet nothing spoke of his passing: no new order of things, no gathering together, no harvest. The sound of rain could not erase the lost murmuring of the bees. The soft thud of falling acorns from the trees close by the house was like a long burial that would continue without ceasing until the old trees had cleansed themselves of the summer's fruit. When supper was over, Andrew said,

"Weezie will come tomorrow and wash the blankets. She knows where they are."

"I can do it, I can wash."

"No need. Weezie'll do it as she always does."

Early the next morning Ellen awoke to the sound of voices on the back porch. Weezie had come and was speaking to Andrew.

"Summer's all right maybe . . . but winter . . . we stay in that cabin all winter we need a new roof . . . and other things. . ."

"All right, I'll fix your roof."

"We stayin' the winter?"

"Send Francis over after dinner and I'll give him the order for shingles."

Ellen dressed and went out to them. The rain had stopped, the sun was coming up over the trees into a clear sky, the air was cold and sparkling. Andrew had gone away without his breakfast. Weezie was bending over a box piled in the stacked rubbish against the house wall. At the back door a little boy dressed in overalls and jumper was picking up acorns. Weezie heard Ellen's step.

"Run on back home, you!" she called to the child. "White woman don't want you hangin' round her house."

"I don't mind, let him stay."

"He better off home. Mist' Andrew say he better off home." The little boy ran obediently around the corner of the house and disappeared.

Ellen was glad for a woman to talk with, and wondered why she had not thought of making friends with Weezie before. "What's this about your roof, Weezie?"

The negress was young and comely. Her skin was the polished color of brown oak leaves, but her face was sullen. She whipped blankets from the box and tossed them into a tub.

"Yas'm, it leaks bad. We ain't never lived in that shack till last summer."

"No? You come from town?"

Weezie did not answer. The rest of the morning she ignored Ellen. When the blankets were washed and hung on the line she went away and Ellen was left alone.

All day Andrew did not come back. She saw that his gun was missing and surmised that he had gone to the marsh for duck. For the past week long strings of duck and geese had been going by, settling down over the woods to the south.

She wandered through the empty rooms of the big house, now and then tapping the walls, but she got no response from the bees. The sun turned warm and the wind dropped, but she did not go out. The earth seemed no longer friendly. The garden furrows ran water. The place where the elders had stood on the bayou bank was sodden with wet leaves. Winter would keep her walking.

In the upper rooms the windowpanes buzzed with drunken wasps

trying to get outside. The sound they made was thin and angry, unlike the full lazy droning of the bees. She found an old paper, folded it, and brushed at the wasps, grinding them underfoot when they fell to the floor, shrinking at the sound of crunching bodies but working doggedly until she had cleared all windows and the floors were littered with disjointed heads and wings and stinging abdomens. All afternoon she worked at her useless labor, and went below to wait for Andrew only at dark.

The chill returned with evening. She carried in the soft dry blankets from the line. When she had tolled the young turkeys into the yard she brought wood and built a fire in the fireplace of the room where they slept. It was ten o'clock before Andrew came. He came empty-handed.

"I thought you'd be asleep," he said.

"No."

"I stopped at a cabin down the river and had the woman cook for me. One duck—all I got. They're scary. Too many hunters out from town."

"Did you have enough to eat?"

"Oh sure . . . the fire feels good."

The morning was a long way off, farther away from the evening than she could remember a morning ever having been, but she could retrace her way in a straight line to its beginning. She did this, sitting by the fire while Andrew drew off his boots. By the time he came to sit on the floor beside her, closeness was no longer between them. Between them shivered the long bright lonely day: the unknown table at which he had eaten, the miles of wet woods he had tramped, the dead bodies of wasps, Weecie's sullen brown face, the little boy hurrying obediently away. All things today had seemed to hurry from her. Through no fault of hers the distance had come.

He lay stretched beside her on the floor. The firelight glinted on his belt buckle. Shielding her eyes with her hand she watched the shining metal rise and fall with his deep breathing. Tired out, he slept on the floor. Any other man would have gone straight to bed, she thought. It was like Andrew to fling himself carelessly on the floor like a dog and drop into slumber with her eyes upon him.

Wind whistled through the crack under the door and set the firelight dancing. Upstairs the windows rattled. She fancied she could

still hear the acorns falling. The light flickered on Andrew's sleeping face, fresh-colored from his day in the windy woods, now curiously smoothed out and rested, young, in its quietness, as she had never seen it before except in laughter. Hating his aloofness, she stooped over him to unbutton his clothes and get him into bed. She slipped the catch of his belt buckle and he stirred and sat up, wide awake after his nap.

He was too young for her. There was something almost frightening in the youth that made love to her in this ruined house. He was like a ghost, a strange bright ghost, untouched by time or by any of the worries that made an ordinary man grow stooped and heavy and easy to possess.

In the morning she looked at his sleeping face, trying to identify him with the man of the night before. The man she saw was old, an object of pity, almost of contempt. Which of the two men held her—the young or the old? She could not solve this puzzle.

For some reason Francis did not come to get the order for the shingles. Throughout the day Ellen listened for his step, or for Weezie's, but neither came. Andrew had disappeared after breakfast. She was again alone. Toward dark she went to drive in the turkeys. She passed around the dry cornfield, made a wide circle in the woods, and came out behind the cabin where Weezie and Francis lived. As she walked through the back yard, past the lighted window, the shining of a mallard's wing caught her eye. She went home wondering. She found the turkeys on the bayou bank and drove them into the yard. Francis might easily have shot the duck. She had no real reason to believe that Weezie had cooked Andrew's supper the night before.

"What's the matter, Ellen?" Andrew came in silently, hung his hat on the nail behind the door, and brushed her cheek with his lips as she stood beside the stove. His lips were the hard cold lips of a man who has been away in the wind.

"Nothin'," she answered.

"Got a grouch? Why don't you be like you used to be? You were a lot of fun, I seem to remember."

"Where have you been all day?"

"Now don't start that. Since you ask, I've been to town to see about shingles. I've no money for shingles now. I had to arrange an account. Weezie's house is in bad shape, needs a new roof."

"There's things you could do here in your own house . . . new windowpanes, a little paint . . . a lot of things."

"Why should that matter to you?"

"No reason. I just happened to think."

"Well, don't! It won't get you anywhere."

When they had eaten he took a paper from his coat pocket, sat down beside the lamp, and began to read. He was smoking a new pipe, also brought from town. His shadow to Ellen was strange upon the wall. She sat apart from him, hugging her knees, listening to the wind.

"Miss Ellen, Miss Ellen!" called a soft voice outside.

Ellen moved from her place by the fire and went to see who the caller might be. Weezie's little boy stood on the top step blinking up at her. This was the first time she had seen him close. She looked at him curiously.

"What do you want?"

"Mama say to find out if Mist' Andrew got the shingles?"

Ellen closed the door to a crack so that Andrew might not hear. She still had a light on the boy's face. She stepped closer to him, impelled by something deeper now than curiosity. She took his face between her hands and regarded him intently. He wriggled, laughed, and tried to break away, but she held him.

"What's your name?"

The little boy rolled his eyes. Yes, those were Andrew's eyes in a face colored like honey . . . the shape of his head . . . his laughter. Here was what had drawn her down the path from the turkey nest, here was Andrew's youth. It was as simple as that. By the child's clear face the man was forever divested of every claim to what he had given way. His laughter? What fool thing he stretched his mouth over meant nothing to her now. Having thought this, she considered with surprise that it was true, and knew also that her knowledge was of long growing and for months had needed only a sight of the child's face to spring into anger. Standing with her back to the door of the house, her skirt whipping her cold legs, she stared across the child's head into the whimpering wood and waited for her anger to come to her.

"Mama say to ask if you goin' stay all winter?" The child watched her eagerly, hunching his thin little shoulders under his jumper coat, dancing on his bare feet to keep them warm.

"Why does she want to know that?" Ellen spoke the question softly. She knew the answer—had known it long. The bees were not the only strangers sheltered by the old house from winter. Well, winter had come and Weezie was tired waiting.

"We lived here till you came las' summer."

"Yes, I know." She felt no anger. She was silent for a minute, and then said slowly, "Well, run along home. Tell your mother the shingles'll be out in a day or two."

The child ran away through the darkness toward the cabin. Ellen closed the door and went to sit again by the fire. Andrew still sprawled in his chair by the lamp. He had heard nothing. She watched the crease in his brown cheek deepen and darken as his lips fondled the stem of his pipe. Every now and then his mouth opened to let out a plump cloud of smoke with the faint plop of a stopper pulled out of a bottle. Ellen counted the sounds, thinking idly how settled the man looked, how old and heavy, heavier than Searls. With this thought came pity, not for him, but for herself. She huddled her shoulders and drew the collar of her dress about her throat. One of the stray cats that lived about the place pushed open the door, padded by her softly close, brushing her skirt, and settled itself on the warm bricks before the fire. Full and contented it lay at her feet, dabbing its licked paws over its ears.

"Your cat caught him a field rat," the woman said heavily. The man looked up from his paper.

"What? . . . Oh! He'd do better to catch the rats in the house."

"I know," said Ellen. "I know now."

"What's that?" He lifted his eyes again from the paper and looked at her. "You say something?"

"No, I guess not. No, I didn't say. . . ."

They sat apart, each owning a separate warmth from the burning logs. Between them the smoke drew fiercely up the chimney and away into the windy night. Ellen closed her eyes and listened to the soft rushing of the flames. She saw the footpath winding back among the trees, away from the river, through the pecan and hackberry saplings that had grown maybe an inch taller, on past the briers where the turkey nest had been, and back the way she had come. The old man who sat reading by the fire would not try to stop her.

The sky was lightening when she rose from bed, dressed, and went silently from the house. From the crib she took four ears of

corn, and she opened the latch on the chicken yard and spoke to the turkeys already down from their perches and stirring about uneasily. Making a trail with the corn she led them through the yard, across the corn stubble, past the sleeping cabin and into the woods. Her feet found easily the path she had taken in the summer, and she went along it, dropping the bright yellow grains of corn, drawing the hungry young turkeys after her through the still woods.

HAIL FELLOW WELL MET

Edwin Herron

JIMMY DOVE had always fancied himself to be a man of some originality, with a flair for good taste in clothes which made drama of the right thing. This made the fact of his third wife's leaving him a bit difficult, for Jimmy had always had the highest opinion of the opinion of the world and had believed that when a man made a correct figure, the eyes of the world would cut a path to his tie through a forest of peasants. In the little second-rate hotel where Jimmy made his home, the riches of his wife's blond beauty and the weight of his wardrobe had given him a feeling of Jovian power in the dispensing of his friendship, the favors of greeting to people who had seen him. Now that his wife was gone, the very heart of his secret strength seemed ripped out of him, the implication of a small, smart, good fellow's excellent virility. He wondered how he might come off best in this mess, in such fashion as to retain the admiration and the envy of his fellows.

No one knew yet, except perhaps the bellhop and the chambermaid, that Jimmy Dove's wife had left him. His good friend, Jack Hooey, with whom he was sitting in the drugstore across the street from the hotel, did not know. This drugstore was the usual haunt of the seemliness of these two gentlemen, Jack Hooey and Jimmy Dove; here they ate and they talked and they drank beer, displaying the product of their careful dressing.

Jimmy looked yearningly at Hooey; he was like a man watching the sun go down on the day before his execution. Hooey, who earlier in the evening had escaped from the hotel without paying his bill, did not appear to be in any different case tonight in Jimmy's eyes. Jack Hooey was a swell in lovely gray, his fingernails were as fresh as part-time bachelorhood must need them, and his wide, weak

mouth balanced the justice of a beginning jowl with the weight of a scimitar nose. His person flowed in gray, and a black hat encircled his round head back from the forehead, as is the right custom, high above one ear and clouding the other. Hooey had found it necessary to beat his bill at the hotel; it depressed him a little that he should be doing such a thing at his age—but tonight and tomorrow were fenced between with glasses of beer and stale rhythms whooping wetly from the radio, and Hooey felt fresh in clean linen without and good beading beer within.

Dove was building a kindly picture of a salesman's convention, held at the store, wherein last night no less than two of the girls had really put on a show for the boys. God, he said, those fellas from Denver! Jimmy Dove shook his head chidingly at them, drinking of his beer. Vast summer had a night majestically sweet and calm beyond the street and Jimmy looked through the door to where it lay in ragged tatters of light and whining cars.

"Having yourself a time, eh, Jim?"

"Oh, just a little heat on, Jack; some of the boys. You know, we had a case of three dollar stuff, a case, Jack, and after a few rounds this Ray Fuller—he's a Denver man—and this Roy Goodbar—he's a Denver man—why they began to talk the girls up a bit. You know how it is; get half a heat on. . . ."

Jimmy raised his hand, twisted his head in a wry, bitterish chuckle. It was one of Jimmy Dove's gestures. Jim was a dark, stamping little stallion of a man and he always savored his deeds and the deeds of men with that wry, bitterish chuckle. It made one think that Jimmy had been in the business of being a man for a long, understanding time. Jimmy liked to leave a place with the harness of a man of the world clanking about him, a raised hand, topcoat over arm, dressed so that one knew that when Jimmy Dove was attired it was no pinning a donkey's tail on an unseen ass in a blind man's game with him! A word: See you again, Lou—leaving the proprietor agreeably sweetened from any gossip, and the casual observer left thinking that there, but for the grace of dressing tastefully, goes a hell of a big shot. And now it would go hard with Jimmy in this neighborhood, with his wife gone; for Dove had lorded it here with her, a lovely bit of blond wearing apparel for his arm. She had paid her half of the rent at the hotel, too. He had been so

manly and she had been so sweet for so short a married life! They had understood one another so well, and now she was gone to her mother—she was an orphan and when she had written in the note that she had gone to her mother, Jimmy had understood. Though Jimmy had no particular crowd with which he ran, the boys were the world: the girls behind the counter, the salesmen who loved to tell their deeds of night, the bellhops, the saggy females from the apartment houses, the husbands with the dogs, all the pleasant cheer of people who knew him and his wife and envied him the good fortune of possessing her.

The little talk on the show that the girls had given the salesmen at the store last night did not seem to stir Mr. Hooey a great deal.

And Jimmy continued.

"I got pretty tight, Jack."

"Hangover?"

"No, it's like this, Hooey: When I go to one of the affairs, a little buttermilk on the stomach, anytime half hour to hour before you start drinking and you can drink an elephant under the carpet." Jimmy pressed his stomach lightly, patting a gesture of proof against the small, tight vest. Buttermilk and crackers, he said.

"Well, buttermilk and crackers."

"Forms a lining on the walls. Oh—" the wry, tossing smile—"your hair comes down and you're in there among them, but not slopped, see?"

Hooey nodded and sipped his beer.

Jimmy sipped his beer.

The girl behind the counter was two long arms crossed loosely over her front, a droop of mouth, black hair combed wet behind large ears. The mighty trash of panaceas and love lotions against the opposite wall was an accustomed confusion in her sleepy eyes. There were no flies, and the ice-cream container shone again beneath its pale stench. Hooey sipped his beer again and listened to Jimmy, and the girl watched a dress salesman spoon chili, black and terrible, out of a green bowl, lank butter on dead brown bread. The place was brilliant with light. A group of four were crowded about a slot machine, pouring monotonous regard, passionless, into the face of the machine. The girl never played the machine. There was a greasy place at the end of the counter near the machine where she

had to put the jam pots for the morning breakfasts. Four bellies pushed against the slot machine in the space between and she thought of the jam pots.

"Where's Blondie, Jimmy?"

"She took a little vacation, Millie. See her mother."

There you go. Where's Blondie? Jimmy looked at Millie; he wanted her to believe that forever. He felt helpless against her. That bellhop knew—those grips look as if they'd been packed mighty quick, Jimmy, some stuff hanging out of them and one fell open. Jimmy sighed. A small hotel where the bellhop called you by your first name—but Jimmy liked it. Who the hell was that woman that he saw today that looked like someone he knew, someone he could talk to now and she'd think of him pleasantly tomorrow and tomorrow? That woman's face kept coming back to him all day, a mirage of a face that would slip away and be gone when approached with any attempt to surround it with definite memory. There had been something at once bland and lively about the face, full of an occasion of which he had been an untroubled part. The place where he had seen her had thrown light upon her face so that the lips were without shadow, pale-colored light, radiance without weight, a sheen of plump life, infinitely acceptable to some part of his mind. It hadn't been the face of a young woman nor yet that of an old woman. Jimmy looked down through the beer in the glass at his fingers showing thick and pinkish; he was vaguely troubled that he could not keep the face with him long enough to identify it. The bland and smiling face would return and smile again over some ordinary phrase in his mind. Jimmy lifted his dark hand airily away from their pink fullness against the glass; he jerked his head wryly, bitterly.

"Vacation, eh Jimmy?" You gay dog, Hooey's eye poked at him.

"The wife just said . . ." Jimmy shook his head gently; he had ordered more beer; Hooey, smooth graciousness of sitting, shaved cheeks and beautiful gray cloth, waiting for the beer and eyeing the foam so that it shrank back to the tap and continued its trip to the counter before him less half an inch of depth, and Jimmy bowed him to it, saying . . . "the wife just said, 'Jimmy, I'm going to mother's for . . . ' 'For about a week?' 'For about a week.' Went this morning, Jack."

He looked at Hooey and knew that Hooey was thinking: A dead *

game sport, letting his wife go on a vacation like this so soon after they were married! Hooey raised his beer.

"Jimmy," he said.

Jimmy accepted the compliment. He drank to himself with a nod to Hooey. A gentleman with a gentleman. This Jack's been around. You can pick 'em, everytime! Just the nod. Smart, dressy, get along with a crowd. Fella don't have to say much: Just the nod! Jimmy began to feel a little glow on the beer. The blandly smiling lips came back to him suddenly and he felt a youthful surge, a fine power, as if the face were a rendezvous, a warm and lively thing to come, an infinite spring and compliance in her for love. The glow of the beer supported the vagueness of the actual memory of the woman and his strange, filling, immediate desire met the memory; the two flowed unceasingly for an instant. Jimmy wanted the glow to linger; the stale grease of a hangover on the lid of an old tomorrow faced him. He needed all the lack of knowledge that these people had of Blondie's leaving him. This was the last time here like this. He wanted to be with someone, a good fella, like Jack. Hooey's neck flesh just above the collar was a pinkish napkin tied with a minute kind of slackness about his neck between the careful tie and the platter of his jaw.

Hooey took the cigarette and they both fumbled with nervous haste for matches. Hooey felt a dull anger, gentle and hopeless against something, a feeling he always felt when he could not light the match that he had found because the other fellow had lighted one first. He sucked flame from Jimmy's hand. The dull fury subsided.

"Well, Jimmy, a man can stand almost anything, even married life, with a wife like Blondie. God, sure is a blond, Jimmy . . ." now take this now, just this little thing. Why couldn't he say to Jimmy Dove, Jimmy, why the hell do you or me have to reach for a match, paw around? We both got cigarettes, we both want a light. Well, now, Jimmy, take it this way, suppose I give you the nod and you get the match, or you give me the nod and I get the light, Christ Almighty! here we're both pawing through our duds, scrambling for a match that we know we're going to get; now listen, Jimmy, it makes me sore as hell and it's a fake, it's like a lot of other things. Now if I was honest, I'd speak to Dove just even about this match idea, but why waste such damned good thinking on Dove here? A

door opened in Hooey's mind, smoothly, Salesmanager, Krispie Krunchie, Inc., Mr. Tunleigh . . . now, Mr. Tunleigh, if every salesman for the Krispies would . . . Hooey's inspiration paused, floundered and fell away and he thought of swinging a tremendous fist against fat belly, a terrible, finishing blow. No! God, *No!* not hard enough to kill him! just a satisfactory, uncomplicated blow. By God! you *bastard!* He was standing at the door, looking at the massive ruin of Tunleigh, Krispie Krunchie, you give me a territory where I got to sneak out of a hotel to buy gas for my goddamned car, you give; the secretary understood and that night over supper, a little supper, intimate and laughing, they arranged for an affair. He stayed with her for a week, a month and she was small and dark; no, she was about like Millie, only not so long in the arms; I've got a good job, Jack, please, you just take it easy for a while. Would he take it easy! He got a job off the road and could she love! I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas; she made little meals for him in the kitchenette and they quarrelled, over cheese—now, I don't like cheese, in any shape, manner or form and here you're giving me cheese, *cheeeese!* By God! That's the way they start, some damn' little thing like socks or cheese; I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas now watch me do my stuff; they don't play the old pieces on the radio any more, God, but I was going to town in those days! *A DING DONG DADDY*; they don't play the old pieces any more on the radio. . . .

"They don't play the old pieces any more, Jimmy."

"What's that, Jack?"

"Jimmy, I knew a woman. I went with a woman who could do impersonations, canaries, cats. Garbo. One time. She was my wife."

"Well, is that so! Didn't know that you were married, Jack."

"Not now, Jimmy." Hooey gave his head a quick shake, somber, sucked air through the side of his mouth with a brisk sound, dragged at his beer. "Not now, Jim."

Jimmy was startled. Here was Hooey, now, speaking of his wife; gone! He was envious of Hooey's advantage, the healthy and comfortable time between him and his wife, long, long, cool time. Hooey didn't seem to be bothered. Sitting there calm and easy. If there were any market of interest for his story he would happily tell anyone. He'd probably tell Millie about it if she wanted to listen. Damn, it was funny! Millie wouldn't be interested in the wives of Hooey.

any more than she would in the wives of the Arabian Nights. It would be just a horn for Hooey to blow, make him interesting. Sure, he'd tell. Spout it out and lay it on. Jimmy wondered if Hooey would say that if his wife had just left him.

"Well, Millie, what do you know! Jack here's an old married stiff. Well, what do you know!"

"Is that right, Jack? You been married?" Millie's loosely crossed arms carried the lax satchel of her breasts. Her big, sweet eyes blinked moistly and glistened with sharp light.

"Oh, you men," she said. "You just marry and leave 'em."

Her arms worked lazily, big bones and lank wrists. Hooey smiled winningly.

"No, Millie, this one left me." He looked at Dove and Jimmy gave him the wry, bitterish smile and the sympathy of the gesture of the hand, waved understandingly, mysterious, old and tolerant; and Millie said: That's one on you, Jack, that's one on you, believe me.

Four of the apartment house harridans trailed in from the street, seeking the light and laughter of the drugstore. Jimmy Dove sat thoughtfully through the small clamors and shrillness of their arrival. He turned on the stool and watched them pass before him, giving a dark, tight smile to each and saying: Hello, Ruby; well, Lorena; nods and smiles and the smell of cheap perfume blooming from the summery flesh. Among the steep heels and silken shins a little brown Pekingese was dragged gently, to be plucked up and carried to the counter. Shrill laughter ripped and flashed from them and one woman turned an egg face bedizened with flat eyes and brutal mouth to Jimmy, asking where was Blondie tonight.

And Hooey gave the answer, crying loudly that poor little Jimmy Dove was all alone, all alone! The wife, the little wife had gone to her mother. Laughter loud and sweet at this sally. The long, dark woman among them with the dull mouth prompted Hooey to insist that perhaps Blondie hadn't gone to see her mother. The bird cries and snarling, incoherent, choking laughter which greeted this sally was full of the good savor of living in Jimmy Dove's nostrils. Here it was, probably the last time all these good fellas would pay their respects to his good fortune. Everybody would know pretty quick that Blondie had left him. It would be impossible for him to say that he had kicked her out—kicked *her* out, my God! If there

was only some way in which he could escape as the Jimmy Dove these people knew, something happen that would take their minds off the affair. Only last night he and Blondie had been talking to the manager of the drugstore and Jimmy had told him that probably they would go on a vacation sometime this summer, just kind of get away from all this for a while. And Doug had said: Boy, you sure are happy! Jimmy had said: Well, Doug, it's just knowing how to live. Doug had looked at Blondie and shouted, with his close-rattling laugh: Boy, you sure said it! And Jimmy Dove had waved off the praise, while accepting it, the one gesture possessing himself of Blondie, good taste, an understanding of life and the envy of men. Together with a light pat on the vest and a tilt of the head.

Dove looked at Hooey yearningly. The beer had begun to make him feel a bit sorry for himself, even more than had the note that Blondie had left. Here was Hooey, now. Couldn't they talk it over? Put it to him in a man's way? Just talk it over, tell him about it, not all, some; he'd been around. Everybody'd know about it tomorrow, anyhow. Couldn't leave the hotel until the weekend. He wanted to savor the extra dish of Hooey's understanding, as man to man, how it was that Blondie had left him.

Hooey was aglow with satisfaction and merry jest. His attention was directed toward the tall, dark girl. She continued an outthrust underlip through all her smiles and Hooey was enchanted with such loveliness. A little dewlap formed a beginning drop of flesh under her still young face at the chin. Jimmy Dove stared at it distastefully. He felt a bit betrayed and lonely that Hooey should display an interest in this girl. She wasn't much; a big tackle, he'd say. Hooey turned at the touch.

"Jack, come over to the room and I'll buy you a drink."

"Now, Jimmy, you wouldn't want me to leave all this!" Hooey was laying out his evening dress of salesman glitter and gleam. It was nice here. And he had good reasons for not wanting to be seen in the hotel again that evening. But he wasn't so certain that he wanted to mess around with this girl. Nice stuff, sure. He winked slyly at Jimmy, pulling the lean girl's nude image between them like a rich wash of flank and thigh and breast on a line. Jimmy Dove smiled tightly and wisely. He could pretend to blow a desire of his own over that wash. Hooey was free, no worries, a good salesman, a nifty dresser. It was part of the creed never to stand in the way*

when one of the boys had marked a woman for his effort. The chance was his and it wasn't sporting to interfere. Jimmy Dove was keenly disappointed, suddenly. A loneliness that didn't belong to the evening cut through the gentle glow that the beer had given him. He watched Hooey capering through the fetid air of an old jest, an old stench, and it reminded him of a horse his dad once owned back in Iowa, an animal that used to work with gray and gloomy patience all the day and yet, with the coming of evening, the gaunt old beast would snuff at fresh cattle droppings and go teetering hideously about the yard, leering through monstrous curled lips, a cringing, horse-shaped bag of lost desire. Jimmy realized keenly that it didn't matter in the least what these people thought of him, that they even might never think of him. The woman's face he had seen that day slipped back to his mind, bland and lighted. It faded again. Hooey was leaning toward the girl now, the other women having drifted to the cosmetic cases, the placard littered prescription counter, where they frankly thumbed the beauty aids like beasts of great deceit. Hooey ordered more beer; one for Jimmy Dove, one for the dark girl and one for himself. They waited for Millie to finish her toil at the ice-cream container, where her arm was a scaffold of thin bone wavering with a thin bunting of suntanned flesh.

"No, Jack," Jimmy said, "I think I'll slip over to the hotel." He pushed away from the counter.

"Don't rush off, Jimmy." Hooey turned from the dark girl and shook his head slightly, a backward roll of his eyes implying that he had changed his mind about the girl. Hooey was short of money and he knew that there was little he could do with the girl; buy her a beer or two, hope for a party to turn up. He looked at Jimmy Dove's marvelous hat, light gray, where shadow dozed with both eyes open in the deft little valleys of the crown. Jimmy might be good for the start of a party, but how get that whisky? Hooey frowned heavily. Tell you what, Jimmy. Hooey looked at the floor. He had money for a cheap room, couldn't spend much. A few drinks would be a fine thing, though. He'd heard that Jimmy wasn't a very heavy spender, but a few drinks would be enough.

"Why don't you go over," Hooey let fly another wink with the proposal and Jimmy immediately touched off his understanding smile, "and come back here?"

Jimmy raised his hand in debonair salute. But he leaned and

whispered: God, Jack, I can't furnish liquor for the whole crowd! He glanced at the women and Hooey nodded. As he nodded Hooey looked through the door; his car was just around the corner. It was a smell of rubber and stale seats in his mind; corners and ready laughter too much laughing at nothing and the door snapping behind him again. They could ride around a bit?

"Tell you what, Jimmy. You come back in about fifteen minutes? Meet you here?"

"Good!" Jimmy said. He nodded to the dark girl, waved at Doug and left them. He passed the slot machine and not one unkind face looked up, the four men about the machine sewing a fine seam with their dulled eyes through the simple maze followed by the steel ball. Sid and Bill and Jeff and Ralph; good fellas, all! Jimmy Dove stopped for a moment at the machine and stared with them. The plunger measured a careful stroke and the ball raced up the incline. Bodies skillfully pressed and tilted the machine. The ball disappeared favorably. Another shot and another and Jimmy sighed, thinking of the men tenderly. He wanted to say something, to push one side of the machine. A brown, sad face at the far corner looked at Jimmy. The face said: Sid's cracked it two-three times, Jimmy. Well, said Jimmy, God. The others felt Jimmy's interest and with languorous movements, making space smoothly, they made room for him. Sid became the personification of skill, host to the time and the moment, dispensing surety to their interest. He would not disappoint the praise of the sad, tanned face. He would not disappoint Jimmy's dark, thin face. Soothed and allured, Jimmy wanted to stand against the machine. His face bowed with the four. The fingers released the plunger, the ball raced soundlessly, touching with suffocating indolence the trapping pegs, and dropped without gain. Well, Jimmy jerked his head and twisted his lips, you guys can do that if you want, but not for me. The four looked up, stirred. The belly under the sad, tan face had pushed with too much vigor against his corner. They looked neither at him nor at Sid, but at Jimmy. Briefly, with a concerted look that was the composite of no feeling whatever. Sid twisted his head sidewise against the blue rush of cigarette end. Jimmy felt again the quality of the face that he had seen earlier in the day. Her face possessed his mind with a thrilling intimacy, though the soft light that filled even her lips had not grown, nor was the face possible to any definite place. It stood some-

where in his mind and the past with the solidity of a rock, changeless, strong and full of peace. And kind. But the clouds in his mind possessed it again and the face was gone.

The rich night was quiet as a room, so soft that distance seemed easy to get at. Glistening cars crouched close to the pavement, slipping from a moment's stop at the corner with strange bitter whines, eager long sounds eternally pressing home a charge that never ceased; a siren gave a long, insane, pulsating scream downtown, like a small mouth torn to the breaking point with a hideous, even scream of agony.

Jimmy stopped by one of the big trees near the corner after he had crossed the street. Sweet heat of the past day radiated faintly from the rough trunk. He drew in a long breath of the tree smell and the scent of it was filled with the taste of the beer. Dove clapped his hand against the bark and looked up at the great limbs. God, big enough. He pushed at it. Now, let me see, he thought, I've gotta make it seem like; no, I've gotta tell Jack. Jimmy walked toward the hotel. No, he didn't have to tell Jack anything. Now that he was away from the drugstore, Jimmy felt relieved from the necessity of speaking to Hooey about Blondie. No, he'd just keep his face shut about it. They'd all know about it sooner or later, tomorrow at the very least. What the hell. Jimmy Dove felt strong and competent and suave. What the hell. He'd get the whisky, go over to the drugstore, have a little drink with Jack Hooey. Jimmy waved his hand shortly. Jack was good company, finest. He didn't have to lose touch with fellas like Jack; tell 'em nothing.

Dove passed the bellhop, who was sitting on one of the metal benches outside the hotel door, and greeted him. The bellhop grinned knowingly. There it was. Now if he went over and talked to Jack about it, there would be at least one of the crowd who'd feel that, well, God, the thing had happened, could happen to any man. Happens every day. Well, by God, Jack, what do you know? This is *good!* The wife—an easy smile and a laugh—just ran out on me! Can you beat that? Why not just talk about it with Jack. Might as well save something out of the mess. A man's got to take it. No way out of it, thing had happened. Christ, gone! Just like that! Leave him holding the bag. Jimmy got his key from the clerk and went directly to his room.

He fumbled around the drawer and couldn't find the whisky.

Pulling all the drawers out, tumble of soiled linen, vague cartons of stuff Blondie had used. No flask. Jimmy searched about the closet, stopping to look at his suits, neat suits. Dressy, mostly dark is best. Never could stand a belt. He kicked at the soiled shirts and linen heaped on the closet floor. By God, she'd taken the whisky. Jimmy shook his head. Blondie didn't drink much, either. He had tried to make her drink more than she did. Afraid of getting fat. He understood that; can't understand, did he have any whisky? Yes, somewhere, a pint. He went back to the dresser and fumbled about. He found a flask, but it wasn't the one. This had but half its contents. Jimmy hadn't put it there, either. Blondie sure as hell must have kicked hell out of the room packing her stuff. This flask was a paper carton, Cream of Kentucky. I don't mind putting out an extra quarter for a pint of whisky; don't thank me, men, just thank God I've got it to give to you! A shot in the mornings made all the difference in the world, sometimes.

Motion picture magazines were heaped on the dresser. Blondie was crazy, naturally enough, about motion picture magazines. Study them for hours. Jimmy brushed them, not unkindly, from the dresser. There was a carton under them and he picked it up, staring at it. Well, by the good God, if this wasn't the pay-off! Jimmy turned and stared at the bed. She must have made a mistake and taken the whisky carton instead of this! Looking at the package in his hand, he tilted it solemnly. He opened the bottle and sniffed at it, and read the inscription on the cardboard packet: Platinum hair . . . Glamorous Glint of Glorious Glamour Emanating Exotic. That was it.

Jimmy poured himself a drink from the half-empty flask of whisky and went to the bathroom for a glass of water. So that was it! He stared around the tiled room. Blondie. By God, she wasn't even a blond! Blondie used that damned stuff on her hair. And the things he'd said about that hair! Jimmy felt deeply ashamed. She sure fooled him. Let him tear around breaking his butt to hand out compliments on her hair. Closing his eyes, Jimmy shook his head fiercely. They had both been *proud* of that hair: It gleamed so! And when she used to come down to the hotel and sleep with him before they were married, he had felt so masculine and dark; and she white and unattainable and easy. Jimmy would then listen to the organ of a Sunday morning, sitting in the lobby, formless words running

through his mind, ready to take shape were it not that the full music made them shapeless by thrilling sweep wider than words, more pliable than speech; and Blondie would swim about in the sound, bright hair and flat cool shadows at her throat and moist heat in her, coming down the hall, coming to him; a lovely haired mistress coming to him had been a sign beyond need for words that he had been a man of the world, the inner court of masculine life had been his, she the royal purple of his state. Jimmy poured himself another drink.

He went to the mirror, intent upon seeing himself so affronted. He was mildly astonished, as he always was at this stage of his drinking, to see his shoulders so neat and small. The broad layers of the big shots of whisky mixed with beer were within him, and over them came the trailing, halting sound of a singer from a radio in one of the rooms on the court, light and blandly limpid, fat with pleading, precocious with desire, like a pretty child dressed in the best fashion peeping at a woman who rubbed her thighs and wept to see them full titled to emptiness; speeeaaak to mee of looohaaaaave ahnd whisper thee words; Jimmy leaned at his reflection and faced himself with necessary sadness. God, what a honey of a song! He bowed his head and choked, a feeling at once dear and intimate, neither unpleasant nor yet familiar, his contracted chest an old cup giving him a sudden gulp of a strange, sweet taste. He wanted to possess it and it overflowed in his eyes, tears running down his hard, dark face. A siren carried its scream in one of the nearby streets, a child awail with head thrown back and sounding absolute fear like one banner held high and forgotten over a blind route. It wasn't Blondie that he gave a damn about. It was something else, not easy to say, to put a finger on. The sound of the siren was like a line that Jimmy's mind followed, back, back, as if his face were actually moving toward the beginning of the sound and he saw again the face of the woman who had been so comfortable in light. She was someone who could give him ease among friends, who knew so much that she could do without . . . could do without? The face faded again and was gone. And Jimmy thought of Hooey. He'd better get back to the drugstore and see Jack. They'd just have to buy another pint. Jimmy looked at the bottle Blondie had left, thoughtfully. Well, what do you know; he could just take that over with him and he and Jack could have a few drinks and he'd say: Jack, you see that?

You thought my wife was a blond; do you know why we just broke up? Broke up? What the hell, Jimmy, broke up? Jack, you know how I am; Jimmy twisted a wry, bitterish smile at the platinum carton, dark, aloof, masculine, strong and hard—you can understand how it is, Jack. Jack would understand, everybody would understand. A man who put so much in an ideal, who could be so spendthrift as to marry a woman for her lovely hair and so prodigal as to throw away the whole body when the hair proved false, this man would be Jimmy Dove. God, Sid, they've sure got to suit that Dove guy! Do y'know, he married a positive honey, we all thought she was a honey, eh Ham, and he just *blew* up when he found that she was dyeing her hair; had a hell of a fight. The *hell* he did! That Dove's the limit! Myself, I wouldn't care if she wore chicken bones in her hair; well, you get that stuff the way he does, easy, you can afford to throw them away . . .

Jimmy finished the whisky in the flask and smoothed his coat about his shoulders. He stood very straight and stared wide-eyed at Blondie's nightdress. She had left it hanging from one of the mirror supports, soiled and rumpled, as if she had slept all her nights with the garment gathered about her armpits, protecting her gleaming body from the bruised sleep upon her face, her flesh white and free in voluptuous bas relief of bed and body, the panel dance of sleep. How she had tricked him, even when she knew that he was fond of saying that his second wife was A-1 class, a woman who dressed like a New Yorker, Blondie had married him boldly, she—Blondie, who dyed her hair! Jimmy felt soft belches blooming within him and the whisky had quite lost to him the taste of that gulp of grief. He dropped a cigarette, fumbling it, and disdained to pick it up, standing straight and immeasurably tall in the night, in the time when liquor cuts off the morrow and time has no movement except that which is fit for complete courage, knowledge and passion. He wanted to hear more of that song, but a family squabble on the radio gave him the fat beauty of a comedian's toilsome humor and Jimmy resented his complacency; wise, just a wise guy, he said, a wise guy! He left the room with the bottle of peroxide and ammonia under his coat.

Leaving the hotel, he passed the manager, who was strolling with his wife. They greeted him with stately and hollow warmth; Jimmy paused for a moment, hips lounging in the splendor of his

trunk and limbs, one foot restively astray with a light stamp of the heel. He twisted a wry, bitterish smile of efficiency before the great, empty and bellicose chin of the manager and the round, sucking face of the mighty man's wife. Jimmy had, at the store, gotten a reduction on a suit for the manager's son. Ooooooh, thank you soo much, Mr. Dove, the manager's wife said. Well—she would hear tomorrow and not from him, that he, Jimmy Dove, had found his wife wanting in but one thing and had, like a man impatient of a life that does not give him the very best, had thrown her out; a man who wants nothing of life but the very best, and lacking that could stand apart and twist a smile, a gesture and be alone, understood in part and forgiven in all. Jimmy smiled himself away from them; he wanted to get to Jack Hooey without delay; simple statements, long perorations filled his mind. He was eager to get the truth going in the proper channels.

He crossed the street above the drugstore and walked without haste to the corner. The glitter of light was pleasant to his eyes and all faces were smiling and everything was gay with simple, identified beauty. He and Jack would just get that pint; go ahead, old man, catch up with me; Hooey, Hooey. Jimmy stopped before he got to the drugstore and looked above the flashing signs and all their common light of the long street to the tall buildings. They were cool with the cool sharpness of an absolutely new knife against the utter peace of the sky and Jimmy wanted to bring their coolness to his face. He took off his hat. His eyes were swimming a little, pleasantly, as he gazed. In the still plenty of the night in the sky the remembered face of the woman smiled a little from his mind. He made no effort to remember it and walked on, smiling, with his hat in his hand, filled with peace and very tender.

When he entered the drugstore, the errand boy was mopping a space on the floor and Jimmy waited delicately before stepping over the mop. The place seemed strangely empty and at once full of people. The dark girl was staring at Jimmy and her underlip no longer protruded. Her mouth was a scoop of weak amazement. The men had left off playing the machine and it seemed to Jimmy that everyone was looking at him. Doug reached Jimmy first. Dove could see the same amazement on the clerk's face as there was on the face of the dark girl and Doug looked past Jimmy, through the door, as he spoke.

"Hooey was killed just fifteen minutes ago . . ." His eyes were filled with wonder and a fear that was nameless, immediate and without hope. Jimmy heard the words with unbelief, unbelief for the sound of them rather than for what they said.

"Why, my God, Doug," he said with disapproval, "I was sitting here with Jack fifteen minutes ago!"

And then he sobered, like a man rising upright from a half sleep and a dream. People moved about him, near him, savoring fear and waiting with relentless criticism for Doug's words. One of them said: Killed him, just like that! And he snapped his fingers, staring through the door with a deep, greedy hunger on his face, an appetite full and helpless and dying.

Hooey had been hit by a car, just stepped on the street for a minute going to his own car. They had carried him in and laid him on the floor; didn't you *see* the ambulance? They all helped Jimmy stare at the place where Hooey had lain. The mop drew away with one last, reluctant swoop. Jimmy sat down by the dark girl. Hooey meant little to him, but he felt as if a shrewd blow had torn off a bit of him, shearing him terribly from some common and accustomed balance. And into the shaken gulf the picture of Hooey came tumbling, in sections and in bits: The plumpness under his chin, the creases of his trousers, the tilt of his hat, his eyes. And then Hooey was complete, winking at him and jerking his head lightly back at the dark girl; and then he was gone and Jimmy could not understand how that could be. He knew that he would never again have so complete a picture of Hooey as that which had just faded and he knew that his mind would make conscious effort to build the picture that it had made involuntarily.

The dark girl sat staring at Jimmy, her hands clinched separately upon her lap. She could not believe her good fortune in having seen an event, for having been there and for her the thing was not yet complete. Jimmy Dove could feel her feeding off him, remembering him as she looked at him. They expected him to do something. He had been sitting with Hooey and those watching eyes hoped to see some fine friendship wrecked, some hurt beyond the one death displayed, so that they might be warmed with the storied heat of humanity. Jimmy breathed deeply and wished with a strange sullenness, obstinate as if it had been there a long time, that he hadn't

come over before these people. The dark girl said: You never know. And she stared at Jimmy.

The bellhop from the hotel was there and he came over to Jimmy with a flask in his hand. Doug put out a glass. A current of approval flowed circling about the place. It was a very cheap whisky that the bellhop had, but he felt that a man in Jimmy's place and a man like Jimmy would drink anything, and needed it. Jimmy understood this and he could not fail them. It was a big drink, and as it poured into the glass the face of the woman with her calm light and her infinite kindness measured in soft radiance upon her lips came to Jimmy's mind again, fully and completely. A profound terror and loneliness filled Jimmy's mind and he knew that the face was a lie, that his mind had tricked him and in the face was nothing that he knew, **was nothing, nothing.**

He held the glass of whisky for a moment, staring at the dark girl. He knew that when he drank alone, the only one there to drink, he would have satisfied their need, and out of this they would say more than they ever should about friendship and grief. But he could not escape, though he knew that they would say: Hooey's friend, Jimmy Dove, stood there and downed the biggest shot of whisky I ever saw, never fazed him!

Jimmy stood up and as the glass touched his mouth the quality of that woman's face was with him again, as if she were light shining of itself from lips and cheek. He jerked his head with its wry, bitterish gesture and gulped the raw stuff down. He sank back on the stool to hold the liquor; all that which had been in that face was a goddamned lie; it was nothing, nothing, nothing calm or bright or radiant. The furious liquor would not stay down and Jimmy Dove was sick against the counter.

THE TREASURE

Grace Lumpkin

WHENEVER she remembered that they lived on Cemetery Street, that is, when a funeral passed by, Missy felt sad. This was not the street's real name, but many people called it so. The old houses which had been there long before the new cemetery was laid out on that side of town sat far back from the street with many trees in front of them. Missy's own house had two huge magnolias in front as if it put up hands to hide its eyes from the sad processions that went by. At least that is the way Muddie expressed it.

Muddie was a person who could make any house seem both comfortable, that is a place where it was good to rest, and alive, that is a place where exciting things might happen at any time. There were times when Muddie went about with a sad face, not because of the funeral processions, but because she was feeling the pinch of poverty. She said this herself. And Missy visualized a large, shadowy creature with pockmarks on his face, and a hideous leer. This was Poverty and he went about giving a pinch here and a pinch there, and always after he had pinched his leer grew tremendous and much more hideous and he laughed because he was pleased to see Muddie going about with a sad thin look on her face.

But there were many times when Muddie did not feel the pinch, in fact, according to Father she did not feel it enough, and that was when many a family discussion took on a note of despair. Sometimes it took on a note of anger when Father spoke of what he called Muddie's predilection. As he spoke it this word sounded like a shameful thing, like a drunkard, and it was some time before Missy realized that what Father meant by that large word was Muddie's passion for auctions.

There were nine children. On an afternoon in January six of the nine children sat in the dining room, the only room where a fire

burned continuously, and waited for Muddie to come home. It was not late, but already dark, so that the electricity was on and some of the children were at the dining-room table studying or reading, most probably reading for they were all great readers. But it might have been Latin and Algebra that kept them at the table because if a bad report card came around at the end of the month it roused Father's anger even more than Muddie's predilection roused it.

The coal in the grate was heaped up very high and glowed redly, for it was a cold day, and the children had already talked about the possibility of snow which came only once every two or three years.

Missy was the first to hear Muddie's steps on the front piazza and she was the first at the front door to open it. Muddie was literally hung with bundles like a Christmas tree with presents. She dropped some of the bundles into Missy's arms and groaned, "Oh my feet." But it was what might be called a cheerful groan. The other children, or some of them, came and received all the bundles from Muddie's tired arms. But Missy, who was observing, noticed that Muddie kept one package in her hands and would not give it up, and immediately Missy felt a great curiosity about that bundle.

Missy led the way to the dining room and Muddie called, "Be careful, Missy, those are oysters," and Missy gave a yelp of delight.

In the dining room Muddie let herself down in a chair and groaned again and Missy laid the packages on the table over Brother's Latin and hastened to get Muddie's old shoes from her room. Kneeling at Muddie's feet Missy changed the shoes and Muddie gave a sigh of relief and smiled about at the children, who stood waiting to hear of her adventures and especially waiting to know about an auction and how Muddie had bid so much and how someone had overbid her on the very object that she so much coveted.

With all the children about her, some standing close to her, some lying on the floor before the fire, looking up into her face, Muddie was like a queen with her court, and she took on the manners of a little queen, at least the sort of queen who is gracious and loves her subjects and knows that they love her. That was all which might be called queenly about Muddie, because with nine children and Poverty going about ready with his pinch it was hardly possible for Muddie to behave like a queen. For queens do not darn stockings and socks and cook and clean house, and make over the clothes of

the older children so that the younger ones can wear them for best.

The coals shone redly into Muddie's lively smiling face, and into the faces of the children. Muddie said to Missy, "Put the oysters out in the kitchen," and when the older children, who had not run to the door to meet Muddie because they were too dignified, heard that there were oysters they lost their dignity and whooped with delight.

"I bought the oysters," Muddie said, "though I know they are expensive, because I was late and an oyster stew will take only a little time to prepare." She seemed to be talking not to the children but to be explaining to Father. But Father would not be in until later and the children paid little attention to the explanation, for they were thinking of the stew with butter and salt and pepper floating on top and the lovely smell that would presently come from the kitchen and that would soon be right under their noses in the soup plates on the table.

"And this," Muddie lifted the package which had been in her hand all the while, "is a little something I found at Mr. Leary's." She smiled secretly and did not look at the children but at the bright coals in the grate.

"What is this?" the children wondered. "No auction? And what could Muddie find at Mr. Leary's department store that would make her smile as if she had bid highest at an auction for something she wanted." But they did not speak out loud and waited.

"Mr. Leary was having one of his sales," Muddie said dreamily, "one of those sales he has about every three years, when he brings out everything, simply everything he has not sold for thirty years, since the very first year he came over an immigrant from Ireland and set up his store. I went in," Muddie made a curious little gesture with her head. It was coquettish and secretive and pleased and excited all at the same time. "I went in just to look around. Mr. Leary is very pleasant and welcomes anyone as if he were giving a reception. So I went in only to say 'how do you do' to him, because of course I did not intend to buy a thing, not a thing. It is not only extravagant but a horrible waste of money," Muddie said severely, "to buy any useless thing when your children need shoes and stockings and . . . and other things." Muddie spoke firmly and severely, but she looked as if she did not really believe what she

said and the secret smile was still on her mouth and over her whole face.

"So I went in and spoke to Mr. Leary and he was delighted to see me and urged me to look at everything, so of course out of politeness I had to do so," Muddie explained, and again it seemed that she was explaining to Father. "And there were so many things there, a heap of panne velvet at ten cents a yard. Ten cents a yard!" Muddie repeated. "Of course there were some . . . well, some worn places, but a person could cut around them in making up a dress. It was simply a crime not to buy it. But what could we do with yards of brown panne velvet?" Muddie asked the children, and of course they did not know what could be done with yards and yards of brown panne velvet. And yet the very sound of the words was rich and luxurious and made the children feel rich and luxurious.

"But," Muddie fingered the package in her hands, "as I looked over the things piled on the counters and went from one counter to another . . . a long way down, almost at the very back of the store I saw a counter with winter underwear on it. And I thought that even though this underwear was old, it might be washed thoroughly and used, cut down, for some of you. So I went to that counter. And do you know the price that was put on that underwear? It was one cent for each set, one cent! But I saw at once that the underwear was too old and it was filthy, simply filthy with years of accumulated dirt. Not even a Liza"—Liza was the washwoman for the family—"could have washed it clean. But I lifted the pieces up, keeping my gloves on, just to be sure there wasn't something that I could use because," Muddie put her hand to her face and laughed, "at that price! I thought surely I might find one set that could be used. But it was all filthy, just filthy from I don't know how many years of staying in the basement.

"And then, as I lifted the underwear, I saw something lying underneath, right down on the counter, flat on the counter under all that pile of filth. It gleamed a little, as I pulled the underwear away. And then, under all that filth, like a treasure under dirt was a . . . there . . . before my eyes was . . . this . . ." Muddie lifted the bundle, but even then she did not move her fingers to open it.

But the children crowded closer to her, for they knew the moment was coming.

"I had found a treasure, Children," Muddie said dramatically. "And who can blame me for trying to rescue it from that filth. I could not leave it there, I could not, Children. And so I took it to Mr. Leary and he said there was a special price on it . . . and I spent . . ." Muddie whispered, "I should not have done it, but I paid a dollar and a half for it. I think Mr. Leary saw that I wanted it and so he asked a little more than he might have otherwise. But there it was. I had to rescue that treasure. It was so beautiful. And now . . ." Muddie's fingers slowly untied the string and slowly unwrapped the brown paper. Suddenly she stopped and said, "Don't tell your father. I will tell him when . . . when the right time comes. But don't tell him tonight. And now . . ." Muddie said again and threw back the folds of paper. There in her lap was a fan. She spread the fan out before her and made that curious little gesture with her head that expressed so many things and looked at the children over the top of the fan.

It was a beautiful fan, large, with ivory sticks and painted chiffon. The figures on the chiffon were as delicately painted as the miniature on ivory that Muddie kept in the old-fashioned walnut box which was called a "desk" and which had belonged to her mother. The sticks were plain, almost brown with age and almost as transparent as the chiffon.

Muddie looked at the children over the top of the fan, "Don't you think I was right?" she asked. "Wasn't it worth anything! And how could I leave it there with all that filth of thirty years?" Muddie waved the fan before her and said, "It would have been a crime!"

The children looked intently at the fan and each of them saw something there and felt and heard something of what Muddie was trying to say. Missy saw a garden with box hedges and wisteria in bloom. She smelled the wisteria and heard music. The small blossoms fell from the clusters of wisteria and as each struck the ground it made a note of purple music. The figures stepped out from the fan and moved in the garden.

And then there was a loud noise at the back of the room. Muddie dropped the fan into her lap. The children jumped, startled from their concentration. The door from the hall into the dining room opened and there on the threshold stood Father.

Muddie's hands fumbled in her lap as she covered the fan with the brown paper. She whispered, "Take this, Childy," to Missy and

slipped the whole mass of papers and fan into Missy's hands. Muddie rose and met Father and kissed him and said, "We are having oyster stew for supper."

Father kissed her and then he looked over her head at Missy who had her hands behind her back fumbling at the paper, trying to hold the fan and the paper at the same time, and looking very guilty along with it all.

Father spoke with a note of heavy reserve in his voice, a note of quiet reserve as if he were covering up something that was about to explode, just as we covered a can at Christmas time, after we had already lit the giant firecracker inside. Father said, "Have you been to an auction?"

"No," Muddie said hastily, "not at all. I know better after all the Christmas expenses than to go to an auction. I know much better. Because I always spend money somehow at an auction. Oh, no," she said firmly, "I would never go to an auction, especially at this time of the year."

Father lifted his nose suspiciously as if he knew something was going on in that room and as if he could smell what was happening or what was about to happen. His face and his whole attitude said, "There is something unusual in the air."

And everyone else in the room, including Muddie, had a guilty look on their faces.

"We are having oysters for supper," Muddie said brightly, "oysters," she repeated.

The paper crackled in Missy's hands that were behind her back and the noise was like a firecracker going off unexpectedly at their feet.

"What is that in Missy's hands?" Father asked.

Missy's hands fumbled more than ever, and the paper crackled in the silence, and then the whole thing, the paper and fan, fell to the floor. No, not on the floor, because Missy had backed away toward the fire and all that she had been holding fell on the iron hearth of the grate, close, very close to the bright coals.

Muddie cried out and sprang to the fire and lifted the fan up tenderly in her hands. She turned to Father with the fan in her hands and with a sad guilty look on her face.

"It was so beautiful," she said, "don't you understand. It was so beautiful."

Father did not speak. He did not even whisper the word predilection. Perhaps it was the sad, funny, guilty look on Muddie's face that changed him. For suddenly his stern face softened. He put his hands on Muddie's shoulders and gave her a little shake. And then Muddie clung to him and he clung to her.

Muddie said, "I know the money would have bought shoes and stockings," and she pressed her head against Father's shining greenish coat.

And then she turned about to the children and there was a happy and relieved look on her face. She said, "Clear the table, Children. Childy, open those boxes of crackers and bring me the milk. Did you put the oysters in the kitchen?"

She went to the sideboard and gently laid the fan in the right-hand drawer.

THE BEREFT*

Gene Albrizio

THANKSGIVING

AS MISS LILLIE HARPER closed the front door and fastened the collar of her winter overcoat up around her ears, it was evident from her whole demeanor that no ordinary errand was taking her out on such a night.

Miss Lillie had not expected such weather, especially on the day before Thanksgiving. There was something unreasonable about a storm at this time. There was, for instance, the Ladies Aid Society, which annually looked forward to the pleasure of decorating the tombs of Gulfhaven's dead on Thanksgiving morning, and now this pleasant and compassionate service had been nipped.

Earlier in the afternoon Miss Lillie had paced her living room, nervous as a cat, listening to the storm, for storms always made her nervous; they made her so nervous, in fact, that she did not dare use the telephone, and so was denied, even, the incidental consolation of commiserating with her friends of the Ladies Aid and of sharing with them her own bitterness at the prospect of the spoiled Thanksgiving morning. But now, since this other business had come up she would be occupied with more urgent business on Thanksgiving morning, and she couldn't have gone to the cemetery with the Ladies Aid anyhow.

Miss Lillie's faith in the wisdom of Providence had been restored with the news received only a few minutes ago that there would be more important happenings on Thanksgiving morning—that there were other friends who would need her more even than the Ladies

*The characters and events of this story are entirely fictitious; no reference to actual persons, living or dead, is intended.

Aid. As night fell, her isolation had become intolerable, even here in her snug living room, and she had decided to get in touch with Marcia Truitt, who wrote the social column for the *Gulfhaven Gazette*, and who could always be depended upon for a creditable report of the most recent events. Upon removing the receiver from the hook, she had heard someone talking over the party line about Jeanie Cranley's attack of black vomit at Our Lady of Sorrows Hospital, and everybody knew what that meant.

Miss Lillie's life was entirely given over to her friends: there was no one more helpful at a funeral. She had to go, she knew it, and offer her services at once. Haste was necessary, for she was confident that everything would fall on her shoulders; there was nobody to look after things except poor Julie and poor, poor Mr. Cranley. Julie was still an inexperienced girl for all of her twenty-two years, and men were really only grown-up children after all. She owed it to dear Jeanie to see that everything was done in accordance with the best traditions, with each detail carried out with such flawless opulence that even the most critical wouldn't have a word to say. She would order a blanket of roses for the casket, and arrange to have Stella Poche sing "Now the Day Is Over" at the grave. But to begin with, of course, she would have to stay at the hospital and receive Jeanie's friends who would be coming to leave cards, now that the news was out.

In cases of bereavement, of course, the important function of liaison between the stricken family and the world at large devolved upon the most intimate friend of the deceased. Though the authority of this tradition was unquestioned, considerable difficulty sometimes arose between rival claimants to the position. In Jeanie's case, however, no one had a better right to this position than Miss Lillie, unless of course, Celestine and Zelma had managed to get there before her. Celestine and Zelma were sisters and they 'phoned each other as soon as they heard anything, while Miss Lillie had only herself to depend upon.

She was now half a block from the hospital, and as her apprehensions deepened, she broke into a trot. She was gasping for breath as she ascended the steps of the hospital and her eyes strained anxiously toward the glass of the front door. The first glance was disheartening. There was Celestine, still blond and slight at fifty, gracefully gesticulating with her long slender hands, and Zelma, so

small that Miss Lillie could hardly pick her out in the crowd, was dolefully shaking her head while her brown eyes snapped with excitement beneath the hennaed ringlets which were neatly plastered across her forehead. There was no doubt that they were already "explaining everything" to the other callers. Miss Lillie hurried inside.

"At about ten o'clock this morning," Miss Celestine was saying, "she had an attack of black vomit. After that she lost consciousness almost immediately and she hasn't recognized anybody since."

"No, Celestine," Miss Zelma interrupted, "I think you ought to tell everything just the way it happened. At first Dr. Darcy wasn't sure and he thought the vomiting might have been caused by some broth she had drunk; so he called Dr. Dealy for a consultation. It was while they were having the consultation that she lost consciousness, and after that Dr. Darcy pronounced it black vomit and said she was probably dying."

Miss Celestine crossed her hands in front of her. "Very well, Zelma," she said at last, "I suppose I don't know anything about it. I suppose I haven't known Jeanie Cranley all of my life. Suppose you tell it then, since you know so much."

Mrs. Rucker, that apologetic shadow of a woman in the front row, furtively lowered her eyes, and her left shoulder twitched nervously. The minister's wife was an unfortunate appendage to her more resplendent husband. For years the congregation had marveled how such a woman could ever have attracted a man of the dynamic personality and brilliant intellectual attainment of the Reverend Dr. Rucker, a man who was even now engaged in the task of humanizing the Bible by translating the King James version into everyday English. It may have been that the rarified atmosphere of daily companionship with a spiritualized intelligence had robbed her being of all substance and her will of the ability to be heard above the beautiful sonorous voice that had so often drowned out her own, but on such occasions as this, when dissension threatened the flock, she transformed herself by an anemic miracle into a sacrificial oil for troubled waters. It was to be expected then, that in the present crisis the minister's wife should bite her lip and lead the conversation into channels of peace.

"And Mr. Cranley and Julie?" she inquired firmly. "I suppose they are with her?"

But that was the part Miss Celestine generally told next anyway.

"Syd Cranley is the most pitiful thing I have ever seen," she exclaimed, rolling her eyes upward and turning her head from side to side. "He's been sitting by her bed all day with his head in his hands and every now and then great tears roll down his cheeks and he groans: 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' "

"It's fortunate he's such a true Christian," Miss Zelma observed, "I always say that a person with no religion to fall back on is absolutely lost at a time like this."

"There is something terrible about seeing a strong man go to pieces," continued Miss Celestine. "You know he was simply devoted to Mrs. Cranley. I honestly don't believe he can live a year without her. Nobody can survive a grief like that; and he had been having trouble with his back anyway."

Miss Lillie sighed. "Men are so helpless," she commented.

"It's mighty bad," agreed Mr. Edgar, Miss Zelma's husband.

"If only Syd and Julie got along better," lamented Miss Zelma. "They would mean so much to each other now."

"Yes," Miss Celestine admitted. "But Julie has never cared for Syd anyway. Even before her mother married him, Julie used to say that he had a nose like a horse—though she had always been very fond of horses," she added after a pause.

"It is so often that way when there are children," the minister's wife hastened to explain. "I always say that a person with children has to think twice before marrying again."

"Oh, it's not just that," Miss Zelma insisted. "Julie's always been an odd child. Jeanie was one of my own best friends—everybody knows that—but I just never felt I could get close to Julie, devoted as I am to her. Oh, she was popular enough with the gentlemen. That at least was some comfort to poor Jeanie. But she always was—she was—just peculiar."

"Yes, Julie had always been odd," Miss Celestine admitted. "Today, for instance, she hasn't said a word. She's just sat and stared at her mother. Sister Angela finally gave her a room and persuaded her to lie down. She's in there now, but she won't see anybody. You'd think she'd want her mother's dear friends about her at a time like this. They could be such a comfort, if she'd only let them. Why, she hasn't even talked to Dr. Rucker."

"Well, er—her father, you know," Miss Lillie reminded them with a kindly, reminiscent smile.

Again, in the ensuing hush, the minister's wife was taken with a nervous twitching, and she moistened her lips. But just at that moment, Mr. Edgar announced: "Here comes Dr. Rucker."

All eyes were trained on the two Corinthian columns that marked the entrance to the lobby.

The Reverend Dr. Rucker was a fine, large, vital man, but as he approached these members of his congregation, his face, despite the cheeks which shone like winesap apples, was grave. "Yes, yes," he said, stopping and facing them all, "the poor man seems quieter now. We had a short service together, and I persuaded him to take a little nourishment. It is truly a sad case. The workings of Providence are inscrutable, and we can only have faith, faith such as I have just seen in that poor man. I suppose that there is nothing else we can do on this terrible night." He looked at his wife, then, through the glass of the doors out to the portico, where the water still dripped. "Yes, yes, a terrible night. Can we give anybody a lift?"

The group stirred uneasily, on the verge of breaking up.

"Wait a minute," cautioned Miss Celestine, producing a card with a pencil attached to one corner. "I want you to write your names on this card, so I can show it to the family later."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Rucker, waiting patiently until the list was passed to her, "at a time like this these little things mean so much. I will write my sister's name, too, if you don't mind. She wanted to come, but she works, you know."

She turned after her husband, who was already moving, slowly, towards the door. He seized her by the arm, pulled one of the heavy doors open with an authoritative hand, thrust her through and followed with a touch of briskness in his step. He was going to dinner with Miss Wee Wee Duchez. And Miss Wee Wee was the one member of his flock who could be depended upon to provide a meal to his liking: the soup finely flavored with sherry, not boiled, but heated in a hot-water bath to just the right temperature; and ducks, perhaps, with a tender brown crust enclosing the delicate, rare flesh, oozing rich, red blood with every juicy mouthful. He would enjoy the great peace that invariably descended upon him at the conclusion of such a meal, and while his wife and Miss Wee Wee

chattered together after the manner of women, he had formed the pleasant custom of floating above their heads into the realms of philosophical speculation, made more pertinent and poignant now by the death of this good woman.

The group, in silence, watched Dr. Rucker and his wife go out. The door swung to, and they all turned back to each other. All except Miss Celestine, upon whose face a sudden expression of horror was fixed. "Look, Zelma," she gasped. But Zelma was looking. Her gaze was riveted upon a little knot of late-comers across the lobby, near the door. "Look, Zelma," Miss Celestine said, "it's Lillie, she's—"

II

For hours Julie Darcy had been lying there on the little white bed where Sister Angela had put her, listening to the wind breaking against the sharp corners of the hospital, and thinking about everything that had ever happened to her. That morning, far away and vague, seemed like a gray dome, filled with jumbled, colorless masses, in which all the things she had ever done or thought of doing had gotten mixed, blurred and flickeringly like an old movie, with the things she had read about or seen other people do.

In one corner of the room she could see the big, bulging curve of Uncle Jack's back, hunched over a small electric stove that was supposed to give heat. Cousin George was sitting beside him, as straight as a ramrod, with his knees crossed and his hands stuck in his pockets, looking more like a patient owl than ever. Most of the time they just sat there and stared at the red eye of the stove, like people waiting for a train that is, already, a long time overdue. When they spoke, they weighed each word carefully, as though they were spending something, and after they had talked for a while they saved up before they said anything else. If only the wind would hush too, perhaps she might feel quieter, instead of lying there with her mind as restless as the trees outside, and her body as numb as a bone. She had felt so strong and sure, she had not believed death could come right in and snatch away something that belonged to her. Though naturally she had known all along that, if she didn't expect a thing, it was likely to happen. So she had been careful to expect death just enough to keep it away, and at

the same time she had been sure her mother would get well.

Maybe if they had had a good doctor, it would have been different. She didn't blame Cousin Bullock—Cousin Bullock had probably been all right when he finished medical school thirty-two years ago. But everybody knew he hadn't cracked a book since, and he never went to any clinics except the railroad conventions. Everybody in the family loved Cousin Bullock; and his mother, Aunt Sophia, was the oldest living Darcy. But when any of them were really sick they would slip off and go to another doctor.

Julie had watched her mother lying there, week after week, with Cousin Bullock trying to guess what was the matter with her. Julie had wanted to do something about it, but Syd wouldn't help her. He always knew better than anybody else, and anyhow, it was his wife who was sick, wasn't it? He had always been like that. Even before they had brought her mother to the hospital, he wouldn't come in the sick room if Julie was there. He used to come home every afternoon holding a little package of ice cream by the handle. She could see him now coming through the park, walking real fast with his toes turned in and grinning down at his feet like it was a lot of fun to be so clever. He would put the ice cream into the refrigerator and sit in the living room, rustling his newspaper and listening for Julie to go upstairs. As soon as Julie left her mother's room, he would fix two saucers of ice cream, one for her mother and one for himself, and they would talk together real low so nobody else could hear them. Syd would lie on the bed beside her mother and hold her hand and tell her how lonesome he was, having to be away from her so much. Her mother had worried about him. "Poor Syd," she would say, "I don't know what'll become of him if anything happens to me." So Syd had gone on, trying to shut everybody else away from her mother, and when Julie had complained to him about Cousin Bullock, he had said: "I find Dr. Darcy perfectly satisfactory, thank you." And had turned on his heel and walked away.

Later, when her mother was getting weaker and weaker, Julie had even gone to Cousin Bullock herself. But Cousin Bullock had a sweet, optimistic disposition. He had patted Julie's shoulder and said:

"Now, now, my girl, don't get upset. Your mother is going through a very trying period, you know. What she needs is diver-

sion. These beautiful, bright afternoons you ought to take her for a little ride in the car."

It was that very night when her mother had tried to go to the bathroom by herself that she had fallen and couldn't make anybody hear for a long time because they were all asleep. When they found her, she looked like she was dying, but, when Cousin Bullock arrived, he said it was nothing; just a little dizziness from being so weak. He had given her mother another dose of turpentine emulsion, and some ammonia to quiet her, and then he had diverted her thoughts away from the sickroom with a little anecdote.

"You know, Jeanie, when I was driving out here tonight, I noticed that there was a full moon, and I was reminded of the time when I was an interne in New York. There was a multi-, multi-millionaire who took quite a fancy to me. I don't know why, but he signaled me out for marked attentions, and he used to invite me to his estate on Long Island. It was an elegant place, and in the back, right along the river, he had a most beautiful fig orchard. We used to sit there on moonlight nights, and watch the boats passing up and down the river. In those days I got mighty homesick, just a young kid away from home like that, and those fig trees made me feel like I was right back in Alabama."

Once a long time before, Julie had asked him what happened to the fig trees in the winter time. "Why, my girl," he said, and patted her on the shoulder, "all those trees were planted in large tubs equipped with rollers, and every winter the whole orchard was wheeled into a magnificent greenhouse that my friend had had especially constructed for the purpose." But that night her mother had lain there while Cousin Bullock was talking, and had rolled her head back and forth on the pillow. Cousin Bullock may have noticed something too, because, as he was leaving, he said it might be well to have somebody who would be company for her mother and that he knew a nice girl who wasn't a trained nurse, but who was just as good and a lot cheaper. The next day Julie had spoken to her mother about getting another doctor, but her mother wouldn't listen either. "I think Bullock is a right good little doctor," she had insisted. "And anyway, I would rather die than hurt Aunt Sophia's feelings."

And that was what her mother had done.

Right now, out of deference to Aunt Sophia's feelings, her mother was lying only a few doors away, no longer trying to live, but struggling to die. She had been at it all day. Julie had watched as long as she could while death taunted her mother. Throwing her up and letting her fall. Pretending to forget about her, and pouncing back with a leap. Slowly wearing the life out of her.

And then it would be too late. Time would be fixed forever in one little minute, that minute holding everything that might have been or ever could be. Julie had never understood what had happened between her mother and herself. There was something about Julie that her mother had resented, something she could not forgive. It had been more like the hen that hatched the duck than anything else, perhaps. She had run crying after her mother, and her mother had answered with a dutiful affection, as though resentful that a stranger should have this claim upon her lifeblood. But it had come so near being right. She could see her mother standing there, smiling and encouraging, and she had thought that some day she would reach her and the mirage would become a reality. She had believed that eventually her mother would forgive her, without either of them noticing it, or even knowing for what she had been forgiven.

Julie was willing to blame the trouble on herself. She knew she was odd. It was on account of her father. She couldn't really remember her father herself, but she had learned about him from Uncle Jack.

"Yes, he was a queer one all right," Uncle Jack used to say, "but he was a gentleman even if he couldn't hit the side of a barn with a double-barrel' shotgun. And he died with his head right here on my shoulder." He would pat his shoulder, the very spot, and would add, "And I always said that I liked him as well as any man I ever knew who played the piano."

Julie would have liked to do something to make up for her father, but it was hard to do anything for a person like her mother who had been born with a natural wit and a comfortable income, and who ruled by inherent right and unshakable convictions.

If she could only have liked Syd! That would have pleased her mother. Julie had tried to like him, but she might as well have tried to lavish affection on a porcupine. Syd lived in a perpetual state of disapproval. There was something allegorical about the way his

indignant eyebrows bristled over the edges of his gold-rimmed spectacles and the two deep furrows plowed their sorrowful path between his beaked nose and the drooping corners of his mouth.

But in spite of Syd, there had been happy times too. Those homecomings, during the years away at boarding school. Julie used to sit by the Pullman window, watching for the train to get into Gulfhaven. She would sit there on the plush-covered seat, helping the train across the big bayou with the long bridge and the thick-kneed cypress trees squatting in the slow water; pushing the train past the five old ships that never moved from their place in the creek, where they had grown brown and rust-eaten and taken root in the green shoots of the cat-tail plants; waiting while the train labored by the state docks with the blocks and blocks of spur tracks and fireproof warehouses, all as vacant and deserted as a church on Monday: except for a few ships flying foreign flags, and one or two tall paddle-wheel river boats with negroes half-heartedly unloading cotton from up the country. And always the dirt-caked little shrimpers, gossiping about the harbor, their nets spread across the rigging, and the barefooted crews cooking on the decks over charcoal pots. Finally would come the squeaky rail that sounded like a cheerful cricket, and the next instant she would see her mother standing on the platform, as excited as Julie, with a hat that was too small slipping back onto her neck, and the wind blowing hair across her face. Julie would shut her eyes and hold fast to her mother, blindly trying to keep out the bigness of the world where people got lost if they let go; eagerly trying to hold her mother always in that moment when the voice would say proudly: "Why, my baby is a big girl now, as tall as I am."

But always there was the thought of Syd popping up again. There was no way to escape him. The air was heavy with the sound of his presence, and in his absence he managed to permeate the house with his anatomy. There were his teeth that he left lying about. At one time he had had lots of teeth; big white ones and more than anybody else. The front ones were still there, but the back ones had given way to a dental plate. Every night the plate grinned lewdly at Julie from the little shelf over the wash basin. Once she had seen a large cockroach walking over the red rubber and exploring the white crevices with his long feelers. She had not disturbed it.

And Syd's back! For years the family had revolved around Syd's back! No matter what the occasion, Syd's back was sure to climax it. As though that were not enough, he had added the steel-and-leather saddle that he had ordered through an advertisement under the trade name of E Z Back. He rarely wore the thing. Most of the time it "aired" on the sleeping porch, suspended from a hook dramatically placed in front of the glass doors. There it hung ever before their eyes, the bright steel reflecting sharply beneath the thick leather hide, the buckles on the belly band clinking in the slightest breeze a continual reminder of Syd's infirmity. It had done something ominous to the sleeping porch. Her mother never passed the spot without a shudder. "Poor Syd," she would say, "that thing is an instrument of torture."

Julie could never forgive Syd about the night of her first Revelers' ball. This event had been the crowning achievement of Julie's life, and even on that night of nights she had had to contend with Syd's back. In Gulfhaven, nothing counted until a girl had weathered her first Revellers'. In fact, the Revellers' was the most important thing that happened all year, and it had been happening every year for seventy-five years. This was not a helter-skelter affair. The guests were carefully selected and their names varied little from generation to generation. The invitations delivered on silver trays, the elaborate supper, the quantities of champagne absorbed without a single hiccup—all bore witness to the superiority of seasoned chivalry over the modern hodgepodge of genial promiscuity.

The day of Julie's first Revellers' was an unhappy one. To fail to "be popular" at the Revellers' was nothing short of a calamity. It brought embarrassment upon the family. It acted like the plague upon eligible young men. The thought of the responsibility of "being popular" was a solemn one. It was like the sound of an owl, hooting in the dark trees on a rainy night. Julie was beset by dire premonitions.

"There must be something fierce the matter with us," Agnes Harding had placidly concluded long ago. "I guess when we grow up we are going to be 'sticks' and our families will be simply furious."

The shadow of that prophecy had never left Julie's mind. There was no doubt that her family would be furious. Ever since she could remember, Great-aunt Sophia had been asking: "Who's your little sweetheart? A pretty little girl like you ought to have a little sweet-

heart." And each year when the clan gathered for New Year's dinner, Aunt Sophia told them all over again about the two brothers who had almost fought a duel over Julie's grandmother; and Aunt Sophia's own daughter, Cousin Mariana, who could sing and play the guitar and had been the best dancer in the canebrake country. It seemed that even Aunt Sophia, who looked so much like a seal now in her whiskers and black satin dress, had once been the despair of a young man who wrote poetry and died of yellow fever and a broken heart soon after Aunt Sophia married Uncle Richard.

"Being popular" had not come naturally to either Agnes or herself, and probably neither of them could ever have gotten anywhere if Agnes had not gone to Annapolis for June Week. It was hard to believe that just one week could make such a difference in a person. When Agnes came home she was wearing an anchor from a midshipman's uniform and she had a fascinating way of twisting her mouth when she talked until you could hardly understand what she was saying.

"I know how to do it now," Agnes had confided generously. "There is nothing at all to making men fall for you. All you have to do is to look straight at them and narrow your eyes to little slits and say 'grand.' And you must learn a lot of cute things to say back at them like, 'I'm so angry I could crush a grape.'"

Agnes' recipe for popularity had gone over well with the college set. It had worked so easily that Julie had almost forgotten the warning of that youthful prophecy. But when the day of her first Revellers' came around, the past and the future suddenly were sucked up into a dark cloud that hung suspended over her head, heavy with presentiments of doom.

"If you don't stop crying," her mother had kept reminding her nervously, "your eyes will look like burnt holes in a blanket and nobody would dance with you if you were Cleopatra herself."

It was long past suppertime when Syd came home. He was walking painfully, with his body warped forward and hooked into a curve. That back of his was acting up again. Moreover, he had been to a vestry meeting and he was mad because Dr. Rucker was going to have another baby and wanted a raise in salary.

"The darn galoot," growled Syd, holding the bannister as he pulled himself upstairs, "nobody told him to people the universe.

A man of God should have his mind on more spiritual things, and anyway, he is making as much money as I am."

"Poor Syd," her mother had sighed, rushing for a hot-water bottle.

Julie was stunned when her mother told her. To stay home with Syd when Julie was facing the most crucial moments of her life! At first she thought her mother had lost her mind. It was like going through an operation; whether she lived or died, her mother ought to be there. She had hoped until the last that her mother would change her mind. Even after she had been seated in a row with the other debutantes around the shiny ballroom floor, she had kept looking for her mother. In the maze of faces she had seen Mrs. Catesby, attended on one side by Miss Wee Wee Duchez, who owned a bed General Lafayette had, reputedly, slept in, and guarded on the other side by Aunt Sophia, resplendent in the diamond necklace that Cousin Bullock's wife had been watching for years.

Eight-thirty at hand, General Vautrain went to the middle of the floor and raised his aristocratic fingers. This had been the signal for an awful silence, broken only by Miss Wee Wee's apologetic asthma. General Vautrain, in the name of the Revellers, bade the guests welcome.

Then it was that the expected surprise had been released. The surprise was the one feature of the Revellers' that varied from year to year, and so guarded was it in secrecy by threat of expulsion from the society that not even the cleverest wife could guess beforehand whether the stage at the rear of the ballroom was going to be Juliet's bower, the cave of Ali Baba, or the beer garden of the Prince of Pilsen. Whatever the nature of the surprise, a tableau was enacted by the more agile members of the Revellers, attired in costumes appropriate to the setting and disguised by masks with fierce mustachios.

"I hope everything is going to be all right," Julie had heard Aunt Sophia quaver anxiously as she passed, "I remember how popular her mother was at her first Revellers'." In the front row she had seen Miss Celestine and Miss Zelma with Miss Lillie beside them, flashing fiery defiance from a rhinestone diadem. They had nodded their heads at her without smiling. The inspection over, General Vautrain blew a blast on a silver whistle, the orchestra

relaxed into semijazz, and each maiden stood at the refined mercy of society.

But the Revellers had not proved such a difficult lot after all. They began cutting in, two or three at a time. Julie had been exhilarated to find that she had this sure power that would excite people, and that she could turn on and off at will. It had made her excited too, being able to work it like that. Her feet raced faster and faster, following the Revellers, and her tongue clattered faster and faster, following her feet. It didn't matter that her partners were soft and clumsy. That strange power that was hers had gone to her head. They were coming back again. Faster and faster they went. Faster and faster they whirled. People were beginning to look at her. She was passing them all. Three doughfaces, bobbing up in front. She would have to choose one, and then there would be two. The wind rushing by, the lights swaying, she had passed everyone now, she had run away from them all. Suppose she couldn't stop if she wanted to? Suppose she were to take the bit in her teeth and run on and on, out through the door, out across the world, this strange power and herself, racing together?

Afterwards, going into the silent house had been like coming out of a matinee into the drab daylight of a quiet afternoon. There wasn't a sound except Syd's snoring. She had taken off her slippers and tiptoed upstairs. At the top of the steps her mother was waiting.

"I heard the car drive up," she whispered, and then "Cousin Bullock phoned and told me," she added happily, taking Julie in her arms and kissing her. They crept into Julie's room and closed the door.

"Now tell me all about it," her mother said.

And they had sat there until early morning, her mother with her feet drawn up under her, and the long plaits of black hair running down over her shoulders. They had sat there on either side of the bed, whispering together like two girls at boarding school.

"You must get some sleep now," her mother said finally, tucking her in bed and kissing her again. "I knew all along my baby would be just as popular as anybody; I just knew she would."

Julie had fallen asleep easily and happily. Her mother was proud of her, she had conquered the Revellers, what more was there in life to live for?

The wind was driving through the trees outside the hospital. It might have been the surf, that sound. But Julie knew it wasn't. It was the wind, and it wouldn't stop.

"I hope we don't get much rain with this," remarked Cousin George. "We've got some cotton on the wharf."

Uncle Jack grunted.

The door jolted open, as though the storm outside had suddenly reversed itself and spent its force against the lock. A long black shadow moved mimickingly across the wall, followed by Miss Lillie, stepping gently with a sickroom tread.

"I came to see how you are getting along," she explained. "I told Celestine and Zelma they might as well go home, as I would have to stay anyway. You know," she continued, smiling at Cousin George and fidgeting with her handkerchief, "I never desert my friends. My life has been a life of service. When I hear the call, I drop everything and go where I am needed."

The sound of metal striking on wood grew louder in the hall. It was the rosary around Sister Angela's waist. The sound stopped outside the door. She was coming in.

The young nun's eyes looked tired under the white points of her medieval bonnet.

"In these small hours of the night," she began softly, speaking to Julie, "the vitality grows weaker. I think you had better come now and be with your father."

Julie sat on the edge of the bed. She wasn't ready for it. She would never be ready for it, no matter how long she might be expecting it. That faint breath had not been much, but it had been there.

"Just lean on me," Miss Lillie was insisting, slipping her arm around Julie's waist and trying to pull her to her feet. "These shoulders are broad and accustomed to their burdens."

"I'll go with her," Uncle Jack said, brushing Miss Lillie aside and helping Julie away.

Julie found the bed and buried her head in the pillows. As long as she lived she would see it: a blaring carbon electric light turning everything green and a nurse in a white uniform dripping drops of water from a piece of cotton, dripping drops of water between two

twisted gray slits, trying to stop that rattle coming from behind the teeth; eyes, popped from their sockets, straining towards the sop, reaching to live with a rattle in its throat; and Sister Angela, changing pads of wet cloth on the grisly claws with purple veins sticking up, trying to keep the dead flesh from feeling cold while the rest of it died. It had been her mother that she had looked at. Her mother and herself, looking across the bed at one another in the early morning again, and her mother rattling at her.

"There, there, kid, take it easy," Uncle Jack's voice came through the feather stuffing. "You must think of Syd. You will have to help him now, you know."

"Take some aspirin," Miss Lillie was directing over and over like a stuck phonograph record, "take some aspirin, that will make you feel better."

A sudden blast of wind struck against the window with a clap of thunder. The panes shook in the casements and outside there was a splintering crash and the thump of falling wood. Julie raised up sharply from the bed and looked at the window.

"That did it," she said quietly; pressing her hands together in front of her and smiling weakly, she whispered: "My mother is dead."

"Take the aspirin," Miss Lillie persisted. "Just drink it right down."

Julie swallowed the water with her eyes on the door. She must have seen it all somewhere before. She knew already the things that were going to happen. In a moment the door would open and Cousin Bullock and Syd would come to tell her that her mother was dead. They were outside now, the door was opening. Her mother was dead at last.

Syd stood in the center of the room with his head thrown backward and his hands covering his face. He swayed to and fro from his feet, and his shoulders shook as if they would knock his whole body to pieces.

"I want her brought right home," he sobbed, "I want to keep her with me as long as I can. I want her to rest in her own room, where I can watch beside her. The last long vigil before I join her."

Cousin Bullock patted Syd's arm. "Come, come now," he urged, "you must try to get some rest."

"Yes," Cousin George joined in, "I'll stay here and see that everything is attended to, just the way you want it. Go home and try to rest."

"The last long vigil before I join her," repeated Syd, uncovering his eyes and calling up to the ceiling.

"Poor old fool," thought Julie looking at Syd. "Poor lonely old fool, standing there like a snaggle-toothed hound dog, that's been locked up to howl in the corncrib." She steadied herself against the bed. It had all happened before, everything except that gnawing in the pit of her stomach.

"Let's go home," she said wearily, taking Syd by the arm and leading him out of the room.

Outside the wind had quieted, leaving a sullen cold that bit under the skin, and there was a sky full of stars, as indifferent and colorful as chips of ice. Cousin Bullock brought his car, and Miss Lillie helped Syd into the back seat and got in beside him. As the car started Syd began to keen:

"I want the notice phoned to the paper. I want it worded like this: 'Deceased, November the twenty-eighth, Jeanie Darcy, the beloved wife of Sydney R. Cranley.'"

"Now Syd," comforted Uncle Jack, "try to calm down now. You've got to get hold of yourself." The car stopped in front of a house.

"Call the paper," Syd insisted, getting out of the car and starting up the front walk. "I want the notice put in just as I said. 'The beloved wife.'"

"You must get some sleep," said Cousin Bullock, catching up with Syd and helping him upstairs. "I am going to give you a hypodermic."

Julie went into the living room and stood looking out at what was left of the night. The wind was gone now. The street lamps burned blurred circles of yellow haze into the dark, but across the park the bulk of houses was beginning to take form and the tall sweet-gum trees stood bare and shivering in the first cold uncertainty of light. Miss Lillie was bustling around the room, adjusting chairs and straightening the magazines on the table. Someone was telephoning the message: "Deceased, November the twenty-eighth."

"The beloved wife of Sydney R. Cranley," came Syd's voice from upstairs. "The beloved wife—" The rest was lost as the hypodermic took effect.

CHRISTMAS

At an early hour Christmas morning, Syd was at the cemetery again. Stooping painfully from the waist, his black-clad figure moved across the green turf, leaving the imprint of his feet in the light frost that had fallen earlier. His eyes, deep sunken behind the lenses of his spectacles, anticipated his slow progress, and sought the mound of earth that seemed so small here outdoors, in spite of the flashing green of the winter grass that had mercifully covered it. As he came to rest beside the grave, a smile of contentment wavered across his pale face, and he anxiously scanned the wreath of holly in his black-mittened hands, as though to make sure he had not lost a single berry.

It was good to be back in his garden of Gethsemane, as he liked to think of this spot. The first paroxysms of grief had passed, leaving in their wake a soul subdued by sorrow—yes, subdued by sorrow, that was it, he would say—and encompassed by a treasure trove of precious memories that shut him off from other men. But here in the cemetery he no longer felt his loneliness, his isolation. Breathing the serene atmosphere of the silent tombs, surrendering to the influence of inaudible voices, he sensed man's affinity to all creation, a feeling both edifying and mysterious. What was it, what poet had said "Let me feel the all of it," or something of the sort? That is what he had done. He had not shirked pain, and out of suffering had come the realization of the unity of life and a new understanding of the Christmas message of the fellowship of man. For however improbable it might seem at first glance, he knew now that all people were his brothers. Not socially, of course. But through the bounty of his love for her, who as his guiding star had cleansed his heart of earthy passion, he had become conscious of a spiritual relationship, pleasantly vague and universal. This discovery had brought with it the solacing idea of a life of dedication. He had determined to live as she would have liked for him to live, and for her sake to render worthy deeds of kindness to those around him. It was a casual dispensation of happiness that he had

in mind. A word of greeting, a smile of sympathy, and, above all, a considerate care that the shadow of the cross he bore should not fall darkly across another's life.

He smiled down at the Christmas wreath, and his fingers fumbled clumsily as he broke off a sprig of red berries and drew it through the lapel of his black overcoat. It was the season of homecoming and rapturous anticipations, when the absent ones returned from far places and families gathered snugly around their firesides. His absent one would not return; there was no need of a glad welcome in his heart. A month ago he would have turned away from the happiness of his fellow men, who reveled in a felicity he could never know again. It was quite otherwise now. He had learned to stand apart, like a nostalgic ghost, and vicariously share the reflected arrogance of triumphant love. At heart, the people of Gulfhaven were a kindly lot. His little acts of kindness had endeared them to him, and he was pleased that he, too, had been able to add to their joy in this holiday season. There was Dr. Rucker, for instance. The poor man had been positively overjoyed when he had offered to take Miss Powell home after choir practices during the preparation of the Christmas music. Miss Powell certainly was of too tender an age to be running around the streets at night by herself, and it had really been pleasant to wait in the empty church, listening to the choir singing of the Nativity and hearing Miss Powell's clear soprano soaring above everyone else. She was a pretty girl and of unusually fine voice, although she lived in one of the poorer sections of town. Her father, it seems, was just an ordinary mechanic in some garage. It was odd, that proclivity of queer people to have talented children.

A gust of morning breeze broke sharply against his face, and he interrupted his musings to stoop querulously and dislodge two brown leaves that were encroaching upon the fresh sod at his feet. Relenting, he presently continued his thoughts. At the office it had been more difficult. To tell the truth, he did not have a great deal in common with those fellows, and it was only when he was away from them that he felt the bonds of kinship existing. Their conversations annoyed him. Of course, times had changed a lot since he was a young man, but in his day a gentleman did not make careless remarks about women, even the other kind of women. Instantly there arose before his eyes visions of vague feminine forms with

buxom bosoms protruding from cheap velvet evening dresses, with coarse plebeian hands and scarlet-tipped fingernails, holding out whisky glasses or lighted cigarettes, and with heavy perfume covering up the stench of unwashed bodies and the filth of cankerous diseases. How could men so far forget the beauty of life as to descend into such sordidness? He had always preferred women of character. It must be that he was domestic at heart, but he liked to think of women baking rolls, or working buttonholes, with a rose in the hair.

However, notwithstanding these secret objections, he had done his bit and accommodated the fellows by taking several chances in the Christmas raffles. It had not amounted to much, but it had served as a gesture of sociability. And the night of the raffle when he was bringing home his turkey and two fruitcakes, he had given the consumptive bookkeeper a lift as far as the streetcar. The man had a sick baby and was disappointed because he had not won a turkey. Why in God's name had the fellow expected to win a turkey? He certainly did not look as though he had ever had wit enough to win anything. The world was full of people like that; they were born helpless and had had a relapse.

His eyes turned with lingering tenderness to the swollen mound of dirt in front of him. Yes, life. He had had it. Years of happiness and life. After a while a man forgets how to be alone. There was nothing she had not done for him. Everything had come from her. He had no longer been a young man at the time of his marriage, and failure had already etched well into his pride. He had felt humbled in the eyes of his associates, and he had known the shame of seeing himself in petty jobs and cheap rooming houses. His soul had become as threadbare as his well-brushed clothes. It had been his wife who had rescued him. She had restored his self-esteem with love, and his position in society with a comfortable income. In time, he too had enjoyed the deference of other threadbare souls and the respectful companionship of the prosperous. And now she was gone, this wife who had managed for him far better than he could ever have managed for himself, and who had protected him with the healing wing. Even from the grave she was still protecting him. Otherwise, why had she neglected to make a will? Her failure to do so proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that she wished to leave her affairs entirely in his hands. It meant that he was her appointed representative on

earth, legally and morally. It was a responsibility he did not take lightly. He would repay her confidence by guarding her interests while he lived, and when he was called away he would see that her possessions were left as she would have wished them to be. But Julie . . . That girl had never had a proper sentiment about family matters, and it was plain to be seen that she was resentful because he had come into his wife's property. He wanted to be fair about everything. As far as Julie was concerned he intended to fulfill his duty to the letter of the law. Surely, nothing could be fairer than the law itself, the essence of justice. It was a sacred trust, a confidence he would repay with faithful stewardship.

There was little else he could do now for the woman who had been his first and only love. Thinking back there were other women whom he had thought he fancied. But they had been as ephemeral as fragrant shadows. There had really never been but one woman in his life. He remembered the first time he met her. He could see her yet with her black hair drawn softly back from her face and the front teeth that showed when she smiled, wide apart like a child's. The memory was as fresh as though it had been yesterday. She had never changed for him. She was always smiling. He couldn't remember her any other way. It would always be so. No matter what the years might bring, she would be there, smiling in his heart. He would not have it otherwise. The only change he asked of time was that he might learn to think of her and smile also.

He drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose. The cold was beginning to penetrate. Already it was time to go. He looked around him reluctantly. Gazing in whatever direction, his eyes met great live oak trees shimmering gladly in the warm sunshine. And there was the narrow white road, dusty with powdered oyster shells, ending forever at the cemetery gate. Some day he, too, would make his last trip over that road and lie quietly in death, as he had so often lain in life, by the side of his beloved. If only he might erect some fitting memorial, some monument as durable as love itself! But it was not in every man's power to construct a Taj Mahal as a boastful symbol for posterity. After all, what truer memorial could a man give than a life of service?

And in the meantime he had done the best he could with the cemetery lot. The green iron bench looked very neat, and in the spring he would plant azalea bushes, and perhaps a japonica or two,

the shell-pink variety that used to please her so. In a few days now the headstone would arrive. He had ordered it from Vermont, of the same firm that had made Mr. Catesby's. It was a very handsome stone, made of rough-hewn granite and of double proportions, with a place on one side where his wife's name would be carved, and a vacant space on the other for his own—when the time should come.

His right hand moved up against his back, and he labored slowly to his knees and removed his hat. For a few minutes he remained quietly with his head bowed. At length he sighed and bent over the grave.

"When the time shall come," he whispered huskily, readjusting the wreath of holly, under which he had foolishly hidden a spray of mistletoe.

EASTER

Dr. Rucker faced the empty sheets of paper spread out before him. Tomorrow was Easter and he had delayed with his sermon. Perhaps too long. Looking at him from the top of one of the ivory squares was a bare first line: "As we cast our eyes backwards for two thousand years upon the glorious effulgency of that radiant morning—" A good beginning and in his best manner, but where was the rest of it? How easily during the years at the seminary the sonorous phrases had rolled from his tongue faster than his pen could put them down! Those had been the days of inspiration, when he had been the center for a group of friends, interesting but perhaps a little less brilliant than himself. Those had been the times when he had stood proud and tall, with the gift of eloquence upon him, and had drawn the attention of all eyes through the sheer force of magnetic attraction. How bright the future had seemed then, how full of epigrams his ready mind! But there had been so many Easters when he had turned the old barrel of sermons over and over. He had simply gone dry on the subject. The morning was well advanced and soon he must go and make sure about the communion wine. Yes, he would have to go now and do that.

They had completely slipped his mind, but there they were—the ladies of the Altar Chapter decorating the church. Miss Cel-

estine, armed with shears and a roll of green crepe paper and followed by the negro sexton, was meandering around the chancel, apparently in search of bare flower pots. She had stopped now to cut delicately a strip of crepe paper and to direct the negro in the task of tying it in place. Dr. Rucker's experienced eye traveled quickly through the group and instantly picked out Mrs. Kent, the president of the band, who, seated in one of the choir stalls, surveyed the activity of her colleagues.

"Mrs. Kent," he noted with satisfaction, "I must go and speak to her."

On the way he passed Miss Lillie, her eyes trained on the tops of two stepladders, where negro men were working with unwilling fingers at the business of twining leafy vines around the pipes of the organ. Miss Lillie was standing there between the ladders, stanch and tense like an accustomed pointer in high grass, the quivering excitement of her body concentrated upon the careful placement of the bamboo leaves while her ears strained forward in an effort to catch snatches of the conversation that was going on between Miss Birdie Puckett and Reba Knight.

"I don't know why it is," the dark woman called Miss Reba was complaining, "but Fred never does nice little things for me like other people's husbands. Now there is Alice, for instance. Frank is perfectly lovely to her. Just last week he bought her another fish set. Fred would never think of buying me a fish set."

Dr. Rucker's ears burned guiltily and he hurried towards Mrs. Kent.

"Why, Mrs. Kent," he exclaimed gratefully, "how splendid of you to be here working with us!"

Mrs. Kent leisurely turned her head and smiled at the minister. She was a beautiful woman of aristocratic bearings and slightly given to nervous breakdowns. But now she sat, composed and luminous, like sculptured alabaster, with the light inside her face flickering on and off.

"Now you mustn't overdo," Dr. Rucker cautioned solicitously.

At the sound of the minister's voice the ladies paused in their occupations and lifted their heads towards the minister. "Like a garden of flowers," as Dr. Rucker sometimes thought to himself. "Of course," he continued, speaking to Mrs. Kent, but democrati-

cally raising his voice to include the other ladies, "of course, I know how much it means to all of us to have you with us. That is right, now isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," echoed Miss Lillie, pointing at a truant leaf, "I don't know what we would ever have done without her butler and chauffeur."

"And her excellent taste," amended Dr. Rucker.

"Indeed," agreed Mrs. Guilbeau, whose niece had married an official close to the Prince of Wales. She was arranging pots of Easter lilies along the altar rail. With careful precision, she centered a flower in the middle of the altar and turned the pot over on its side so that the lily jutted out at right angles above the communion table. Then she stepped back to contemplate the effect and to confer with Dr. Rucker and Mrs. Kent.

"Do you think we should turn two pots this year?" she asked anxiously.

"Suppose we let Mrs. Kent decide," deferred Dr. Rucker.

Mrs. Kent reflected. "Of course you may do as you think best, but you know we have never turned but one."

Mrs. Guilbeau nodded. "Well it looks as if we are almost through. As soon as we get someone to place those palms in front of the choir—"

Miss Lillie placed her hands proudly on her hips and sauntered out in front of the minister.

"And what do you think of my organ?" she preened.

Dr. Rucker paused to consider. "Splendid, ma'am, splendid," he reiterated. "Now do not tell me that you ladies are not artists," he pleaded, "the way you have transformed everything in just a few hours."

"Don't forget," reminded Miss Birdie, leaving the eagle's neck of the mahogany lectern and fluttering over to Mrs. Kent, "to save a place for Mr. Cranley. He wants to put on a standing basket in memory of his wife."

"If I were to die," lamented Miss Reba, "Fred would never think of sending a standing basket for me."

"Nonsense, Miss Reba," playfully chided Dr. Rucker, "you know that your husband would be only too happy to send you a—er—" He stopped abruptly and repeated: "Artists, yes that is what you are. You ladies are all artists to the finger tips."

Mrs. Guilbeau shook her head. "Poor Mr. Cranley," she said, **"I have never known a man to grieve so."**

Miss Lillie had again retreated to the stepladders, but now she scurried out to join the conversation. "But Mrs. Guilbeau," she asked with a significant shade of meaning, "have you seen Mr. Cranley lately? I certainly don't see any reason to waste sympathy on him now. I saw him the other day, all dressed up with a flower in his buttonhole, and—"

Miss Celestine snapped the shears noisily together, and having got Miss Lillie's attention, glared insistently at Dr. Rucker's back.

"Let us judge not that we be not judged," interposed Dr. Rucker gently. "And remember, Miss Lillie, the words of the prophet: **'Rend your heart, and not your garments.'**"

Standing at bay, Miss Lillie smiled bravely, forgivingly. "I was only going to say that Mr. Cranley doesn't speak to me any more. After all these years of friendship with dear Jeanie! He told a certain party that he saw me titter as he was helping Miss Powell—"

"Well, Lillie," broke in Miss Celestine, "I don't see how anyone can fail to be glad that Syd seems a little more cheerful. I know positively that he is just as faithful as ever to Jeanie's memory, and every Sunday he takes fresh carnations to her grave."

"Yes," testified Miss Reba, "only last week I saw Mr. Cranley at the cemetery, kneeling in the rain with his head uncovered, and I remarked to Fred at the time that a man of Mr. Cranley's age, out in that weather, was likely to catch pneumonia and die. I always enjoy riding in the cemetery," she added; "it is the only place where **I can get Fred to drive slowly.**"

During the discussion Mrs. Kent had sat looking straight ahead. Suddenly the light flickered on inside her face. "Isn't that Mr. Cranley over there?" she asked, inclining her head ever so slightly towards the back of the church.

The words fell like a bombshell. The ladies, huddled like timid sheep around the pastor, turned their helpless gaze towards the rear of the church. There, his face looking white in the shadows, was Mr. Cranley. He was standing patiently—in fact, nobody could know for how long he had been there—with his head bowed just a little and his hands fondling the brim of his brave new hat.

"Why, my dear Mr. Cranley," bellowed Dr. Rucker, rushing

down the altar steps with his hand outstretched. "This is a surprise. The ladies will be delighted."

Gravely Mr. Cranley unbent his head and shook hands. "Did you notice," he inquired, with a kind of modest eagerness, "if my standing basket has come?"

"Well, no, I did hear something about it, but I can't say that I noticed any particular flowers among so many. But I tell you what we will do. We'll go right up and find out about it."

Mr. Cranley looked disappointed. "No," he said, "I just thought I would ask." He waited uncertainly, as though about to speak. "The fact is," he said at last, "I am sorry to trouble you on such a busy day, but there are one or two little matters—"

"No trouble at all," encouraged Dr. Rucker, slipping his arm around Mr. Cranley and patting him on the shoulder. "We can step over to my study. If the ladies will excuse us then." And with a bow and a sigh of relief, he guided Mr. Cranley protectively past the altar and into the dusk of the vestry room.

"I guess everybody gets lonesome," apologized Mr. Cranley. "After a while you kind of expect it and it just seems natural. And then again there are times when you have to talk to someone."

"That is right," said Dr. Rucker cheerily, seating himself at his desk and picking up his pipe.

"I don't know if it happens to everybody, but I have been thinking a lot lately. And it is a right funny thing, but the present isn't real at all. I get homesick for my house, just as if I were not living there. And I think of all the friends I have known, and those I have lost through death—and otherwise. Friends are not made overnight. Only time can bring the treasured ties of memories shared. You do not get the fruit without the blossom." Mr. Cranley rubbed his hands together, timidly. "And so, I do not know whether I have done right or wrong, but after all these years I have written to Ben Carter." He lowered his head as if he were in a confessional, and added hesitantly, "I suppose you have heard of the trouble between Mr. Carter and myself?"

"No," said Dr. Rucker warily. It was not his habit to pry into the personal feelings of others. He preferred to mind his own business. He puffed on his pipe and waited.

"It was during the Spanish-American war," Mr. Cranley reminisced, as though he were talking to himself and did not expect an

answer. "Ben was serving in the ranks and I had received the commission of captain. I did not mean to alienate Ben, but on active duty an officer cannot fraternize freely with the men. I never understood fully what happened. Perhaps Ben was lonely. That's what I tried to believe was the reason. It was pretty dull waiting around in those malarial swamps. Ben began to go—he began to frequent—those—those places—" Mr. Cranley's voice broke off abruptly. It was clear that Dr. Rucker's attention was fixed upon a ray of sunlight that struggled through the trees and stretched a warning finger across the window pane. "I have no right to bore you with this. No, I haven't—no— But I can't get it off my mind, what happened between us. I think of him when I go to sleep at night. He was my friend, once. I see him dancing at the senior ball. And little things like that are all I seem to remember. And so," he concluded, "I have written to Ben Carter. I have asked him to meet me at early service on Easter morning. There is no need of words. I have asked him to join me there, that in the sight of God and man we may come together in Holy Communion."

Dr. Rucker was deeply moved. He could find no word to say. Ashamed, thinking, "I have never really known this man," he reached both arms across the table and pressed Mr. Cranley's hand warmly between his own.

"Of course," Mr. Cranley speculated, "I do not know what answer Ben will make. I only feel that it is what she would have wished."

For a moment they sat there in silence.

It was Mr. Cranley who spoke first. Like a man who closes one book and is about to open another, he straightened in his chair, gently detached his hand from the other's clasp, and cleared his throat. "And now the other little matter that I want to take up with you,"

Dr. Rucker attended his visitor with his eyes, but he scarcely heard him. He was honestly trying to take stock of himself. What had happened to the fresh savor of his own old-time principles? Had he not learned to accept man's limitations rather than to expect his regeneration through Christian influence? What a difference between a life of acceptance and a life spent on the high seas with the waves breaking over the prow of the ship, and the sound of the Master's footfall in the storm winds that tear at the rigging. And

now here was this man—a man who had come face to face with the Crucified and his regeneration through faith had taken place as naturally as the wind blows.

"I suppose you may have heard rumors," Mr. Cranley was suggesting.

"Rumors—rumors," Dr. Rucker repeated, forcing himself back to the moment. "No, I can't say that I have."

"At any rate," Mr. Cranley began again, "I don't believe it will come as a surprise—"

"Surprise?" echoed Dr. Rucker politely.

Mr. Cranley cleared his throat. The only sound in the room was the clock beating like a live pulse in the silence. "I am going to be married to Miss Margaret Powell," he announced.

"What—but," Dr. Rucker began. He took off his spectacles but quickly raised them up and put them on again. Mr. Cranley was standing there before him and his voice was crooning on. "Nothing is changed, you understand. We both want everything just as Jeanie would have liked it. No crowds, no display. Just a quiet little ceremony next Monday afternoon at four o'clock."

Dr. Rucker pushed himself up out of the chair and blinked his eyes at Mr. Cranley. "Do you mean Maggie Powell, the little girl who sings in our choir?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Cranley firmly, "Miss Margaret Powell. You see," he went on to explain, "since it was in the work of the church that Miss Powell and I were first drawn together, we feel that our marriage takes on a deeper significance, coinciding as it does with the Easter season. No fuss, no bother, just you, Dr. Rucker, and a few candles on the altar, and the dedication of our lives to one another consecrated by the benediction of the church's promise of life renewed."

Dr. Rucker was standing in the middle of the floor, snapping his spectacle case open and shut.

Mr. Cranley, all of his fingers folded on the brim of his hat, stood there and looked down at his feet.

Like a man escaping from a dream, Dr. Rucker pulled himself together. "I hope you will forgive me," he apologized. "Just a touch of surprise. I want to wish you happiness, I am sure."

Mr. Cranley paused on the door sill and extended his hand. "You understand," he smiled wistfully, "there are some things that

are never forgotten, but as the poet says, we must arise and rebuild again."

The wistful smile faded.

Mr. Cranley's back vanished into the tall shrubbery that lined the garden walk.

II

Julie sat in the pew beside Aunt Trudie and looked out of the window at the live oak trees in the church yard. A few leaves fell through the branches and lay still on the ground. Winter and summer, the live oaks were always changing their leaves. People were milling around in the patterned shadows under the trees. Through the window they looked like figures caught in a diminishing glass, Julie thought. She knew each moving shape among them. She knew they were coming to Syd's wedding and that they would be watching to see whether Julie was there. At least, so Syd had insisted that day. His voice, charged with exasperation, had crackled in her ears. "See here," he had summed up curtly, "I have a perfect right to marry, you know. Your Uncle Jack and other members of your mother's family are coming to my wedding. I can see no excuse for you to go off and try to be a tragedy queen. Besides, outsiders might think you have some grounds for resentment against me, and that would cause unpleasant talk."

Syd had seemed so sure as he stood there in the living room, his throat puffed out like a spreading adder's, his fingers working in and out of his hands. Then he had smiled and gone on to speak of Miss Powell, how she didn't want the care of a large house and how he would be forced to rent the home. "But," he had finished gently as though he anticipated a rebuke, "there is really nothing for you to worry about. I do not intend you shall have to wait for me to die before you get some benefit from your mother's estate. Only be patient for a few years, my dear, until I get one or two little things cleared up, and there will be enough for all of us."

She had watched him standing before her. He had stood just so that night in the hospital room, weaving to and fro on his feet. Only now he wasn't calling up at the ceiling any more, so the dead could hear. Now he was talking low and evasively, as though he couldn't have much faith in those promises. Julie knew he was

merely making excuses; he would have felt uncomfortable if he had come right out and said that she must learn to manage for herself.

That had been early last week. It was just as well Syd had told her ahead of time. She couldn't seem to make up her mind what to do. There was no use starting over in Gulfhaven. When a person had once been labeled in Gulfhaven there was nothing that could ever be done about it. There wasn't anybody who would take her seriously now. Everything she did would always be called a new-fangled whim that would not last very long. She did not understand this friendly mockery that left her as helpless as a fly trapped in a smear of molasses. She felt herself a part of these people, but they would not let her become a part of them. Was it possible that there were no human beings like her, or was the thing so apparent that people everywhere would notice it? That was what she must learn, and for herself. So she had gone about quietly destroying childish relics, packing the old life away in boxes and camphor to be sent to storage. She was calmer now, she could see more clearly. Nothing had been real in that existence except her mother, and she was taking her mother with her. When everything was ready she would go away. There were to be no good-bys. She would even pretend to herself that she was coming back. But she would not come back; and she would take her mother with her.

And so here she was, and Aunt Trudie was craning around in the pew, trying to smile at old acquaintances. There was a slight movement behind the palms that screened the choir. It was Appolonia and her violin. Appolonia began to play. "O Promise Me" was nearly over when Miss Celestine and Miss Zelma came in, followed by Mr. Edgar. They sat in the pew in front.

"Aren't the Easter decorations lovely?" Aunt Trudie whispered discreetly. "And I do think it is sweet that Syd is to have a home again. Miss Powell is a fine girl, and they are both so devoted to the church."

"It was the most beautiful compliment he could have paid dear Jeanie," said Miss Celestine. "The poor man was so lonely without her."

"They say Miss Powell is a mighty fine gal," grinned Mr. Edgar.

"I loved my sister," put in Uncle Jack, gently and gravely. "Anybody that was dear to her can always count on me. Yes sir,

Julie and Syd and anybody that they pick can always count on this strong right arm whenever they need it."

Outside the window the live oaks were still dropping their leaves. The dried leaves fell, one or two at a time, making a small noise like the sound of a scared bird moving around in the branches. The trees were always changing and yet they never seemed to change at all. Julie felt that way herself. She supposed she still looked the same on the outside, but every minute she could feel something happening to her. Even the things Uncle Jack and Miss Celestine had just said; they had made a difference, too. Of course, Syd had a right to marry Miss Powell. They all had a right to be what they were—to do that they were doing. To sit here and smile at each other and nod and approve as if what was happening had no meaning at all. No meaning at all. They had a right to be what they were, charming and pleasant, going about calm and sure and casual and accustomed, with faces like those old houses they lived in. Oh, they had a right to be what they were, Julie thought. And I have the right to be what I am, she thought.

Someone poked her sharply in the back. Julie turned to discover Miss Lillie's face peering anxiously from beneath a nesting bird, which perched precariously on the brim of her brown straw hat.

"Did he make any settlement on you before he married?" Miss Lillie inquired in a reverential whisper.

"No," replied Julie.

"I thought he might have given you the house or something."

"No," said Julie again.

"Love's Old Sweet Song" was finished, the doors at the side of the church swung open and the minister's son, carrying a cross, led the white-robed choir into the church. From behind the vestry door Syd and Mr. Tribble appeared and stood waiting while Miss Powell and her father advanced down the aisle. Julie watched Syd standing there, with a sprig of valley lilies pinned to his coat. She wondered how he would look to Miss Powell on her wedding night when he took out his teeth and went groping around, without his glasses, in one of those voluminous nightshirts. "Dearly beloved brethren," Dr. Rucker began, and everybody stood up.

There was a dry spot in the roof of Julie's mouth. She tried to move it with her tongue and it stuck in her throat like a fishbone

that wouldn't go down. Dr. Rucker's voice had quit saying words; it might have been the drone of an engine coming from a long way off. Ever since her mother's death this feeling was always surprising her. She squeezed her eyes shut to keep in the tears, but she could still see Syd through the blur. His body looked wide and it faded at the edges. He was burying her mother all over again. He was severing her mother's last tie with the living. That slender thread had not been much, but it had been there in Syd and the house. Now Syd and the house had been given over to strangers, and her mother was left with the other dead.

"Oh perfect love," chanted the choir, as the betrothal service ended. Syd and Miss Powell move up to the altar. Syd was kneeling beside Miss Powell. The purple and crimson light from the colored-glass windows touched his chins, which, to Julie's distorted eyes, quivered in the borrowed radiance like the fatted wattles of a turkey gobbler. Miss Powell seemed delicate and pink, kneeling there with Syd's chins quivering at her. Julie wondered what her mother would have thought of that.

Her mother had gone on putting her trust in Syd and letting him blind her to the rest of life. She had established him as a kind of Prince Consort to whom everyone must pay allegiance. There had been no way to approach her except through Syd. Yes, everything had been for Syd. Her mother and Syd had flowed together as inseparably as a stream and its current. They had been so much a part of the same thing you could hardly tell where one ended and the other began. They had never had any difficulty in understanding each other or in appreciating Uncle Jack's girls. It was too bad that Julie had not been like Margaret and Mary Lee.

Her mother had not meant to be unsympathetic. Doubtless she had suffered, too, from the situation. There had been times when she had moved around the house, quiet and shut away in herself. Times when she had smiled bravely and looked at Julie as if she were seeing the ghost of a person who had never been born. And again, there had been those times when her mother had seemed a person apart from the others. Julie remembered her warm and vibrant. They had laughed and cried and played together. It could always have been like that, in spite of Syd, if her mother had not gone back and been a part of everybody else and looked at Julie through their eyes. Why had her mother returned to the others? Why hadn't she

taken some thought for Julie—even in death? Perhaps she had been overwhelmed by Syd and these people. Or could it be that she had had a lot in common with them after all?

Like the sun bursting from behind a cloud, the thought beat down upon Julie with the sudden heat of revelation. In one brief moment she seemed to have grasped something she had been on the verge of remembering for a long time. Neither slow nor fast, new images revolved through her mind. Calmly they came; with all the reality of a dream. She flinched as she remembered the spontaneous kinship between her mother, and Miss Lillie and Miss Celestine. There had never been any strangeness between them. When they saw each other, it wasn't just the three of them who came together. Their fathers and grandfathers and their great-grandfathers were standing there beside them, as if they had all been friends generations and generations ago. And with Margaret and Mary Lee her mother had been comfortable and intimate. She had felt no need of a defense against them. It was Margaret and Mary Lee to whom the legacy of that world was to be entrusted. They had all understood one another perfectly; there had been almost no difference at all. They were practically the same thing. No difference at all. Julie's lips began to move with the words until she almost said them out loud. No difference at all.

The organ was booming the wedding march. Mr. and Mrs. Cranley were leaving the altar. Julie's heart was beating so loudly it seemed as if Aunt Trudie must hear it. "No difference at all," a quiet voice inside her brain kept hammering so persistently that it shut out the roar of the organ. Julie fumbled in her purse to take out her handkerchief. The handkerchief was gone.

There was no use denying it any longer. Her mother had been like everybody else there. If her mother had been there today, she would have sat, with her kind heart and with her lips parted in the girlishly innocent expression characteristic of her, and would have nodded and smiled with the rest of them.

Accomplishment was at an end. The flow of life had reached grade in a pleasant lagoon. The incoming tides of generations washed smoothly over the offshore bar and soothingly choked the lagoon with its accumulative sands.

Wilfully, out of that past she had tried to carry her mother. Like an exile, she had hugged one last thing in her arms, thinking to

keep a link with a world she had loved. But now she knew. She had demanded the truth, and the truth had left her desolate. Now, she had nothing left, not even her mother. Her mother was dead; dead and finished off. She would have to go alone into life which was so necessary to her and which she did not understand. She could no longer take her mother with her. But she would not go before she executed one rite of filial devotion. She must put her mother gently back, without disturbing her, and leave her to sleep peacefully in the spot where her mother would have wanted to be, in the place where her mother rightly belonged.

THE FANCY WOMAN

Peter Taylor

HE WANTED no more of her drunken palaver? Well, sure enough. Sure enough. And he had sent her from the table like she were one of his half-grown brats. *He*, who couldn't have walked straight around to her place if she *hadn't* been lady enough to leave, sent *her* from the table like either of the half-grown kids he was so mortally fond of. At least she hadn't turned over three glasses of perfectly good stuff during one meal. Talk about vulgar. She fell across the counterpane and slept.

She awoke in the dark room with his big hands busying with her clothes, and she flung her arms about his neck. "Not a stitch on y', have you?" she said. And she said, "You marvelous, fattish thing."

His hoarse voice was in her ear, "You like it?" He chuckled deep in his throat, and she whispered:

"You're an old thing-a-ma-gig, George."

Her eyes opened in the midday sunlight, and she felt the back of her neck soaking in her own sweat on the counterpane. She saw the unfamiliar cracks in the ceiling and said, "Whose room's this?" She looked at the walnut dresser and the wardrobe, and said, "Oh, the kids' room"; and as she laughed, saliva bubbled up and fell back on her upper lip. She shoved herself up with her elbows and was sitting in the middle of the bed. Damn him! Her blue silk dress was twisted about her body, and a thin army blanket covered her lower half. "He didn't put that over me, I know damn well. One of those tight-mouth niggers sneaking around!" She sprang from the bed, slipped her bare feet into her white pumps and stepped toward the door. Oh, God! She beheld herself in the dresser mirror.

She stalked to the dresser with her eyes closed and felt about for a brush. There was nothing but a tray of collar buttons there.

She grabbed a handful of them and screamed as she threw them to bounce off the mirror, "This ain't my room!" She ran her fingers through her hair and went out into the hall and into her room next door. She rushed to her little dressing table. There was the bottle half full. She poured out a jigger and drank it. Clearing her throat as she sat down, she said, "Oh, what's the matter with me?" She combed her hair back quite carefully, then pulled the yellow strands out of the amber comb; and when she had greased and wiped her face and had rouged her lips and the upper portions of her cheeks, she smiled at herself in the mirror. She looked flirtatiously at the bottle but shook her head and stood up and looked about the room. It was a long, narrow room with two windows at the end. A cubby-hole beside the kids' room! Yet it *was* a canopied bed with yellow ruffles that matched the ruffles on the dressing table and on the window curtains. She went over and turned back the covers and mussed the pillow. It might not have been the niggers! She poured another drink and went down to get some nice, hot lunch.

The breakfast room was one step lower than the rest of the house, and it was all windows. But the venetian blinds were lowered all round, and she sat at a big circular table. "I can't make out about this room," she said to the negress who was refilling her coffee cup. She lit a cigarette and questioned the servant, "What's the crazy table made out of, Amelia?"

"It makes a good table, 'spite all."

"It sure enough does make a strong table, Amelia." She kicked the toe of her shoe against the brick column which supported the table top. "But what *was* it, old dearie?" She smiled invitingly at the servant and pushed her plate away and pulled her coffee in front of her. She stared at the straight scar on Amelia's wrist as Amelia reached for the plate. What big black buck had put it there? A lot these niggers had to complain of in her when every one of them was all dosed up.

Amelia said that the base of the table was the old cistern. "He brung that top out f'om Memphis when he done the po'ch up this way for breakfast and lunch."

The woman looked about the room, thinking, "I'll get some con-fab out of this one yet." And she exclaimed, "Oh, and that's the old bucket to it over there, then, with the vines on it, Amelia!"

"No'm," Amelia said. Then after a few seconds she added, "They brung that out f'om town and put it there like it was it."

"Yeah . . . yeah . . . go on, Amelia. I'm odd about old-fashioned things. I've got a lot of interest in any antiques."

"That's all."

The little negro woman started away with the coffeepot and the plate, dragging the soft soles of her carpet slippers over the brick floor. At the door she lingered, and, too cunning to leave room for a charge of impudence, she added to the hateful "That's all" a mutter, "Miss Josephine."

And when the door closed, Miss Josephine said under her breath, "If that black bitch hadn't stuck that on, there wouldn't be another chance for her to sneak around with army blankets."

George, mounted on a big sorrel and leading a small dapple-gray horse, rode onto the lawn outside the breakfast room. Josephine saw him through the slits of the blinds looking up toward her bedroom window. "Not for me," she said to herself. "He'll not get *me* on one of those animals." She swallowed the last of her coffee on her feet and then turned and stomped across the bricks to the step-up into the hallway. There she heard him calling:

"Josie! Josie! Get out-a that bed!"

Josephine ran through the long hall cursing the rugs that slipped under her feet. She ran the length of the hall looking back now and again as though the voice were a beast at her heels. In the front parlor she pulled up the glass and took a book from the bookcase nearest to the door. It was a red book, and she hurled herself into George's chair and opened to page sixty-five:

nity, with anxiety, and with pity. Hamilcar was rubbing himself against my legs, wild with delight.

She closed the book on her thumb and listened to George's bellowing:

"I'm coming after you!"

She could hear the noise of the hoofs as George led the horses around the side of the house. George's figure moved outside the front windows. Through the heavy lacy curtains she could see him tying the horses to the branch of a tree. She heard him on the veranda and then in the hall. Damn him! God damn him, he couldn't make her ride! She opened to page sixty-five again as George passed the door-

way. But he saw her, and he stopped. He stared at her for a moment, and she looked at him over the book. She rested her head on the back of the chair sullenly. Her eyes were fixed on his hairy arms, on the little bulk in his rolled sleeves, then on the white shirt over his chest, on the brown jodhpurs, and finally on the blackened leather of his shoes set far apart on the polished hall floor. Her eyelids were heavy, and she longed for a drink of the three-dollar whisky that was on her dressing table.

He crossed the carpet with a smile, she guessed, his delight at finding her. She smiled. He snatched the book from her hands and read the title on the red cover. His head went back, and as he laughed she watched through the open collar the tendons of his throat tighten and take on a purplish hue.

At Josephine's feet was a needlepoint footstool on which was worked a rust-colored American eagle against a background of green. George tossed the red book onto the stool and pulled Josephine from her chair. He was still laughing, and she wishing for a drink.

"Come along, come along," he said. "We've only four days left, and you'll want to tell your friend-girls you learned to ride."

She jerked one hand loose from his hold and slapped his hard cheek. She screamed, "Friend-girl? You never heard me say, Friend-girl. What black nigger do you think you're talking down to?" She was looking at him now through a mist of tears and presently she broke out into furious weeping. His laughter went on as he pushed her across the room and into the hall, but he was saying:

"Boochie, Boochie. Wotsa matter? Now, old girl, old girl. Listen: You'll want to tell your girl-friends, your *girl-friends*, that you learned to ride." That was how George was! He would never try to persuade her. He would never pay any attention to what she said. He wouldn't argue with her. He wouldn't mince words! The few times she had seen him before this week there had been no chance to talk much. When they were driving down from Memphis, Saturday, she had gone through the story about how she was tricked by Jackie Briton and married Lon and how he had left her right away and the pathetic part about the baby she never even saw in the hospital. And at the end of it she realized that George had been smiling at her as he probably would at one of his half-grown kids.

When she stopped the story quickly, he had reached over and patted her hand (but still smiling) and right away had started talking about the sickly looking tomato crops along the highway. After lunch on Saturday when she'd tried to talk to him again and he had deliberately commenced to play the victrola, she said, "Why won't you take me seriously?" But he had, of course, just laughed at her and kissed her; and they had already begun drinking then. She couldn't resist him (more than other men, he could just drive her wild), and he would hardly look at her, never had. He either laughed at her or cursed her or, of course, at night would pet her. He hadn't hit her.

He was shoving her along the hall, and she had to make herself stop crying.

"Please, George."

"Come on, now! That-a girl."

"Honest to God, George. I tell you to let up, stop it."

"Come on. *Up* the steps. *Up! Up!*"

She let herself become limp in his arms but held with one hand to the banister. Then he grabbed her. He swung her up into his arms and carried her up the stair which curved around the back end of the hall, over the doorway to the breakfast room. Once in his arms she didn't move a muscle, for she thought, "I'm no featherweight, and we'll both go tumbling down these steps and break our skulls." At the top he fairly slammed her to her feet and, panting for breath, he said without a trace of softness:

"Now, put on those pants, Josie, and I'll wait for you in the yard." He turned to the stair, and she heard what he said to himself: "I'll sober her. I'll sober her up."

As he pushed Josephine onto the white, jumpy beast he must have caught a whiff of her breath. She knew that he must have! He was holding the reins close to the bit while she tried to arrange herself in the flat saddle. Then he grasped her ankle and asked her, "Did you take a drink, upstairs?" She laughed, leaned forward in her saddle and whispered:

"Two. Two jiggers."

She wasn't afraid of the horse now, but she was dizzy. "George, let me down," she said faintly. She felt the horse's flesh quiver under her leg and looked over her shoulder when it stomped one rear hoof.

George said, "Confound it, I'll sober you." He handed her the reins, stepped back and slapped the horse on the flank. "Hold on!" he called, and her horse cantered across the lawn.

Josie was clutching the leather straps tightly, and her face was almost in the horse's mane. "I could kill him for this," she said, slicing out the words with a sharp breath. God damn it! The horse was galloping along a dirt road. She saw nothing but the yellow dirt. The hoofs rumbled over a three-plank wooden bridge, and she heard George's horse on the other side of her. She turned her face that way and saw George through the hair that hung over her eyes. He was smiling. "You dirty bastard," she said.

He said, "You're doin' all right. Sit up, and I'll give you some pointers." She turned her face to the other side. Now she wished to God she hadn't taken those two jiggers. George's horse quickened his speed and hers followed. George's slowed and hers did likewise. She could feel George's grin in the back of her neck. She had no control over her horse.

They were galloping in the hot sunlight, and Josie stole glances at the flat fields of strawberries. "If you weren't drunk, you'd fall off," George shouted. Now they were passing a cotton field. ("The back of my neck'll be blistered," she thought. "Where was it I picked strawberries once? At Dyersburg when I was ten, visiting some God-forsaken relations.") The horses turned off the road into wooded bottom land. The way now was shaded by giant trees, but here and there the sun shone between the foliage. Once after riding thirty feet in shadow, watching dumbly the cool blue-green underbrush, Josie felt the sun suddenly on her neck. Her stomach churned, and the eggs and coffee from breakfast burnt her throat as it all gushed forth, splattering her pants leg and the brown saddle and the horse's side. She looked over the horse at George.

But there was no remorse, no compassion and no humor in George's face. He gazed straight ahead and urged on his horse.

All at once the horses turned to the right. Josie howled. She saw her right foot flying through the air, and after the thud of the fall and the flashes of light and darkness she lay on her back in the dirt and watched George as he approached on foot, leading the two horses.

"Old girl—" he said.

"You get the hell away from me!"

"Are you hurt?" He kneeled beside her, so close to her that she could smell his sweaty shirt.

Josie jumped to her feet and walked in the direction from which they had ridden. In a moment George galloped past her, leading the gray horse and laughing like the son-of-a-bitch he was.

"Last night he sent me upstairs! But this is more! I'm not gonna have it." She walked through the woods, her lips moving as she talked to herself. "He wants no more of my drunken palaver!" Well, he was going to get no more of her drunken anything now. She had had her fill of him and everybody else and was going to look out for her own little sweet self from now on.

That was her trouble, she knew. She'd never made a good thing of people. "That's why things are like they are now," she said. "I've never made a good thing out of anybody." But it was real lucky that she realized it now, just exactly when she had, for it was certain that there had never been one whom more could be made out of than George. "God damn him," she said, thinking still of his riding by her like that. "Whatever it was I liked about him is gone now."

She gazed up into the foliage and branches of the trees, and the great size of the trees made her feel really small, and young. If Jackie or Lon had been different she might have learned things when she was young. "But they were both of 'em easy-goin' and just slipped out on me." They *were* sweet. She'd never forget how sweet Jackie always was. "Just plain sweet." She made a quick gesture with her right hand: "If only they didn't all get such a hold on me!"

But she was through with George. This time *she* got through first. He was no different from a floorwalker. He had more sense. "He's educated, and the money he must have!" George had more sense than a floorwalker, but he didn't have any manners. He treated her just like the floorwalker at Jobe's had that last week she was there. But George was worth getting around. She would find out what it was. She wouldn't take another drink. She'd find out what was wrong inside him, and somehow get a hold on him. Little Josephine would make a place for herself at last. She just wouldn't think about him as a man.

At the edge of the wood she turned onto the road, and across the fields she could see his house. That house was just simply as old and

big as they come, and wasn't a cheap house. "I wonder if he looked after getting it fixed over and remodeled." Not likely. She kept looking at the whitewashed brick and shaking her head. "No, by Jesus," she exclaimed, "*she* did it!" George's wife.

All of her questions seemed to have been answered. The wife had left him for his meanness, and he was lonesome. There was, then, a place to be filled. She began to run along the road. "God, I feel like somebody might step in before I get there." She laughed, but then the heat seemed to strike her all at once. Her stomach drew in. She vomited in the ditch, and, by God, it was as dry as cornflakes!

She sat still in the grass under a little maple tree beside the road, resting her forehead on her drawn-up knees. All between Josie and her new life seemed to be the walk through the sun in these smelly, dirty clothes. Across the fields and in the house was a canopied bed and a glorious new life, but she daren't go into the sun. She would pass out cold. "People kick off in weather like this!"

Presently Josie heard the voices of niggers up the road. She wouldn't look up, she decided. She'd let them pass, without looking up. They drew near to her and she made out the voices of a man and a child. Then the man said, "Hursh!" and the voices ceased. There was only the sound of their feet padding along the dusty road.

The noise of the padding grew fainter. Josie looked up and saw that the two had cut across the fields toward George's house. Already she could hear the niggers mouthing it about the kitchen. That little yellow Henry would look at her over his shoulder as he went through the swinging door at dinner tonight. If she heard them grumbling once more, as she did Monday, calling her "*she*," Josie decided that she was going to come right out and ask Amelia about the scar. Right before George. But the niggers were the least of her worries now.

All afternoon she lay on the bed, waking now and then to look at the bottle of whisky on the dressing table and to wonder where George had gone. She didn't know whether it had been George or the field nigger who sent Henry after her in the truck. Once she dreamed that she saw George at the head of the stair telling Amelia how he had sobered Miss Josephine up. When she awoke that time she said, "I ought to get up and get myself good and plastered before George comes back from wherever he is." But she slept again

and dreamed this time that she was working at a hat sale at Jobe's and that she had to wait on Amelia, who picked up a white turban and asked Josie to model it for her. And the dream ended with Amelia telling Josie how pretty she was and how much she liked her.

Josie had taken another hot bath (to ward off soreness from the horseback ride) and was in the sitting room, which everybody called the back parlor, playing the electric victrola and feeling just prime when George came in. She let him go through the hall and upstairs to dress for dinner without calling to him. She chuckled to herself and rocked to the time of the music.

George came with a real mint julep in each hand. His hair was wet and slicked down over his head; the part, low on the left side, was straight and white. His cheeks were shaven and were pink with new sunburn. He said, "I had myself the time of my life this afternoon."

Josie smiled and said that she was glad he had enjoyed himself. George raised his eyebrows and cocked his head to one side. She kept on smiling at him, and made no movement toward taking the drink that he held out to her.

George set the glass on the little candlestand near her chair and switched off the victrola.

"George, I was listening . . ."

"Ah, now," he said, "I want to tell you about the cockfight."

"Let me finish listening to that piece, George."

George dropped down into an armchair and put his feet on a stool. His pants and shirt were white, and he wore a blue polka-dot tie.

"You're nice and clean," she said, as though she had forgotten the victrola.

"Immaculate!" There was a mischievous grin on his face, and he leaned over one arm of the chair and pulled the victrola plug from the floor socket. Josie reached out and took the glass from the candlestand, stirred it slightly with a shoot of mint and began to sip it. She thought, "I *have* to take it when he acts this way."

At the dinner table George said, "You're in better shape tonight. You look better. Why don't you go easy on the bottle tonight?"

She looked at him between the two candles burning in the center of the round table. "I didn't ask you for that mint julep, I don't think."

"And you ain't gettin' any more," he said, winking at her as he lifted his fork to his lips with his left hand. This, she felt, was a gesture to show his contempt for her. Perhaps he thought she didn't know the difference, which, of course, was even more contemptuous.

"Nice manners," she said. He made no answer, but at least he could be sure that she had recognized the insult. She took a drink of water, her little finger extended slightly from the glass, and over the glass she said, "You didn't finish about the niggers having a fight after the chickens did."

"Oh, yes." He arranged his knife and fork neatly on his plate. "The two nigs commenced to watch each other before their chickens had done scrapping. And when the big rooster gave his last hop and keeled over, Ira Blakemoor jumped over the two birds onto Jimmy's shoulders. Jimmy just whirled round and round till he threw Ira the way the little mare did you this morning." George looked directly into Josie's eyes between the candles, defiantly unashamed to mention that event, and he smiled with defiance and yet with weariness. "Ira got up and the two walked around looking at each other like two black games before a fight." Josie kept her eyes on George while the story, she felt, went on and on and on.

That yellow nigger Henry was paused at the swinging door, looking over his shoulder toward her. She turned her head and glared at him. He was not even hiding this action from George, who was going on and on about the niggers' fighting. This Henry was the worst hypocrite of all. He who had slashed Amelia's wrist (it was surely Henry who had done it) and probably had raped his own children, the way niggers do, was denouncing her right out like this. Her heart pounded when he kept looking, and then George's story stopped.

A bright light flashed across Henry's face and about the room which was lit by only the two candles. Josie swung her head around, and through the front window she saw the lights of automobiles that were coming through the yard. She looked at George, and his face said absolutely nothing for itself. He moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Guests," he said, raising his eyebrows. And Josie felt that in that moment she had seen the strongest floorwalker weaken. George had scorned and laughed at everybody and every situation. But now he was ashamed. He was ashamed of her. On her behavior

would depend his comfort. She was cold sober and would *be* up to whatever showed itself. It was her real opportunity.

From the back of the house a horn sounded, and above other voices a woman's voice rose, calling "Whoohoo." George stood up and bowed to her beautifully, like something she had never seen, and said, "You'll excuse me?" Then he went out through the kitchen without saying "scat" about what she should do.

She drummed on the table with her fingers and listened to George's greetings to his friends. She heard him say, "Welcome, Billy, and welcome, Mrs. Billy!" They were the only names she recognized. It was likely the Billy Colton she'd met with George one night.

Then these *were* Memphis Society people. Here for the night, at least! She looked down at her yellow linen dress and straightened the lapels at the neck. She thought of the women with their lovely profiles and soft skin and natural colored hair. What if she had waited on one of them once at Jobe's or, worse still, in the old days at Burnstein's? But they had probably never been to one of those cheap stores. What if they stayed but refused to talk to her, or even to meet her? They could be mean bitches all of them, for all their soft hands and shaved legs. Her hand trembled as she rang the little glass bell for coffee.

She rang it, and no one answered. She rang it again, hard, but now she could hear Henry coming through the breakfast room to the hall, bumping the guests' baggage against the doorway. Neither Amelia nor Mammy, who cooked the evening meal, would leave the kitchen during dinner, Josie knew. "I'd honestly like to go out in the kitchen and ask 'em for a cup of coffee and tell 'em just how scared I am." But too well she could imagine their contemptuous, accusing gaze. "If only I could get something on them! Even catch 'em toting food just once! That Mammy's likely killed enough niggers in her time to fill Jobe's basement."

Josie was even afraid to light a cigarette. She went over to the side window and looked out into the yard; she could see the lights of the automobile shining on the green leaves and on the white fence around the house lot.

And she was standing thus when she heard the voices and the footsteps in the long hall. She had only just turned around when George stood in the wide doorway with the men and women from

Memphis. He was pronouncing her name first: "Miss Carlson, this is Mr. Roberts, Mrs. Roberts, Mr. Jackson, Mrs. Jackson and Mr. and Mrs. Colton."

Josie stared at the group, not trying to catch the names. She could think only, "They're old. The women are old and plump. George's wife is old!" She stared at them, and when the name Colton struck her ear, she said automatically and without placing his face, "I know Billy."

George said, in the same tone in which he had said, "You'll excuse me?", "Josie, will you take the ladies upstairs to freshen up while the men and I get some drinks started? We'll settle the rooming question later." George was the great floorwalker whose wife was old and who had now shown his pride to Josie Carlson. He had shown his shame. Finally he had decided on a course and was following it, but he had given 'way his sore spots. Only God knew what he had told his friends. Josie said to herself, "It's plain he don't want 'em to know who I am."

As Josie ascended the stair, followed by those she had already privately termed the "three matrons," she watched George and the three other men go down the hall to the breakfast room. The sight of their white linen suits and brown and white shoes in the bright hall seemed to make the climb a soaring. At the top of the stair she stopped and let the three women pass ahead of her. She eyed the costume of each as they passed. One wore a tailored seersucker dress. Another wore a navy blue linen dress with white collar and cuffs, and the third wore a striped linen skirt and silk blouse. On the wrist of this last was a bracelet from which hung a tiny silver dog, a locket, a gold heart.

Josie observed their grooming: their fingernails, their lipstick, their hair in tight curls. There was gray in the hair of one, but not one, Josie decided now, was much past forty. Their figures were neatly corseted, and Josie felt that the little saggings under their chins and under the eyes of the one in the navy blue made them more charming, were, indeed, almost a part of their smartness. She wanted to think of herself as like them. They were, she realized, at least ten years older than she, but in ten years, beginning tonight, she might become one of them.

"Just go in my room there," she said. She pointed to the open door and started down the steps, thinking that this was the be-

ginning of the new life and thinking of the men downstairs fixing the drinks. And then she thought of the bottle of whisky on her dressing table in the room where the matrons had gone!

"Oh, hell," she swore under her breath. She had turned to go up the two steps again when she heard the men's voices below. She heard her own name being pronounced carefully: "Josie Carlson." She went down five or six steps on tiptoe and stood still to listen to the voices that came from the breakfast room.

"You said to come any time, George, and never mentioned having this thing down here."

George laughed. "Afraid of what the girls will say when you get home? I can hear them, 'In Beatrice's own lovely house,' " he mocked.

"Well, fellow, you've a shock coming, too," one of them said. "Beatrice has sent your boys down to Memphis for a month with you. They say she has a beau."

"And in the morning," one said, "your sister Kate's sending them down here. She asked us to bring them, and then decided to keep them one night herself."

"You'd better get *her* out, George."

George laughed. Josie could hear him dropping ice into glasses.

"We'll take her back at dawn, if you say."

"What would the girls say to that?" He laughed at them as he laughed at Josie.

"The girls are gonna be decent to her. They agreed in the yard."

"Female curiosity?" George said.

"Your boys'll have curiosity, too. Jock's seventeen."

Even the clank of the ice stopped. "You'll every one of you please to remember," George said slowly, "that Josie's a friend of yours and that she met the girls here by appointment."

Josie tiptoed down the stair, descending, she felt, once more into her old world. "He'll slick me some way if he has to for his kids, I think." She turned into the dining room at the foot of the stair. The candles were burning low, and she went and stood by the open window and listened to the counterpoint of the crickets and the frogs while Henry, who had looked over his shoulder at the car lights, rattled the silver and china and went about clearing the table.

Presently George had come and put his hand on her shoulder. When she turned around she saw him smiling and holding two

drinks in his left hand. He leaned his face close to hers and said, "I'm looking for the tears."

Josie said, "There aren't any to find, fellow"; and she thought it odd, really odd, that he had expected her to cry. But he was probably poking fun at her again.

She took one of the drinks and clinked glasses with George. To herself she said, "I bet they don't act any better than I do after they've got a few under their belts." At least she showed her true colors! "I'll keep my eyes open for their true ones."

If only they'd play the victrola instead of the radio. She liked the victrola so much better. She could play "Louisville Lady" over and over. But, *no*. They all wanted to switch the radio about. To get Cincinnati and Los Angeles and Bennie this and Johnny that. If they liked a piece, why did they care who played it? For God's sake! They wouldn't dance at first, either, and when she first got George to dance with her, they sat smiling at each other, grinning. They had played cards, too, but poker didn't go so well after George slugged them all with that third round of his three-dollar whisky drinks. Right then she had begun to watch out to see who slapped whose knee.

She asked George to dance because she so liked to dance with him, and she wasn't going to care about what the others did any more, she decided. But finally when two of them had started dancing off in the corner of the room, she looked about the sitting room for the other four and saw that Billy Colton had disappeared not with his own wife but with that guy Jackson's. And Josie threw herself down into the armchair and laughed aloud, so hard and loud that everybody begged her to tell what was funny. But she stopped suddenly and gave them as mean a look as she could manage and said, "Nothin'. Let's dance some more, George."

But George said that he must tell Henry to fix more drinks, and he went out and left her by the radio with Roberts and Mrs. Colton. She looked at Mrs. Colton and thought, "Honey, you don't seem to be grieving about Billy." Then Roberts said to Josie:

"George says you're from Vicksburg."

"I was raised there," she said, wondering why George hadn't told her whatever he'd told them.

"He says you live there now."

Mrs. Colton, who wore the navy blue and was the fattest of the three matrons, stood up and said to Billy, "Let's dance in the hall where there are fewer rugs." And she gave a kindly smile to Josie, and Josie spit out a "Thanks." The couple skipped into the hall, laughing, and Josie sat alone by the radio wishing she could play the victrola and wishing that George would come and kiss her on the back of her neck. "And I'd slap him if he did," she said. Now and again she would cut her eye around to watch Jackson and Mrs. Roberts dancing. They were at the far end of the room and were dancing slowly. The kept rubbing against the heavy blue drapery at the window and they were talking into each other's ears.

But the next piece that came over the radio was a hot one, and Jackson led Mrs. Roberts to the center of the room and whirled her round and round, and the trinkets at her wrist tinkled like little bells. Josie lit a cigarette and watched them dance. She realized then that Jackson was showing off for her sake.

When George came with a tray of drinks he said, "Josie, move the victrola," but Josie sat still and glared at him as if to say, What on earth are you talking about? Are you nuts? He set the tray across her lap and turned and picked up the little victrola and set it on the floor.

"Oh, good God!" Josie cried in her surprise and delight. "It's a portable."

George, taking the tray from her, said, "It's not for you to port off, old girl."

The couple in the center of the room had stopped their whirling and had followed George. "We like to dance, but there are better things," Jackson was saying.

Mrs. Roberts flopped down on the broad arm of Josie's chair and took a drink from George. Josie could only watch the trinkets on the bracelet, one of which she saw was a little gold book. George was telling Jackson about the cockfight again, and Mrs. Roberts leaned over and talked to Josie. She tried to tell her how the room seemed to be whirling around. They both giggled, and Josie thought, "Maybe we'll get to be good friends, and she'll stop pretending to be so swell." But she couldn't think of anything to say to her, partly because she just never did have anything to say to women and partly because Jackson, who was not at all a bad-looking little man, was sending glances her way.

It didn't seem like more than twenty minutes or half an hour more before George had got to that point where he ordered her around and couldn't keep on his own feet. He finally lay down on the couch in the front parlor, and as she and Mrs. Roberts went up the stair with their arms about each other's waists, he called out something that made Mrs. Roberts giggle. But Josie knew that little Josephine was at the point where she could say nothing straight, so she didn't even ask to get the portable victrola. She just cursed under her breath.

The daylight was beginning to appear at the windows of Josie's narrow little room when waking suddenly she sat up in bed and then flopped down again and jerked the sheet about her. "That little sucker come up here," she grumbled, "and cleared out, but where was the little sucker's wife?" Who was with George, by damn, all night? After a while she said, "They're none of 'em any better than the niggers. I knew they couldn't be. Nobody is. By God, nobody's better than I am. Nobody can say anything to me." Everyone would like to live as free as she did! There was no such thing as . . . There was no such thing as what the niggers and the whites liked to pretend they were. She was going to let up, and do things in secret. Try to look like an angel. It wouldn't be as hard since there was no such thing.

It was all like a scene from a color movie, like one of the musicals. It was the prettiest scene ever. And they were like two of those lovely wax models in the boys' department at Jobe's. Like two of those models, with the tan skin and blond hair, come to life! And to see them in their white shorts springing about the green grass under the blue, blue sky, hitting the little feather thing over the high net made Josie go weak all over. She went down on her knees and rested her elbows on the window sill and watched them springing about before the people from Memphis; these were grouped under a tree, sitting in deck chairs and on the grass. George stood at the net like a floorwalker charmed by his wax models which had come to life.

It had been George's cries of "Outside, outside!" and the jeers and applause of the six spectators that awakened Josie. She ran to the window in her pajamas, and when she saw the white markings

on the grass and the net that had sprung up there overnight, she thought that this might be a dream. But the voices of George and Mrs. Roberts and Phil Jackson were completely real, and the movements of the boys' bodies were too marvelous to be doubted.

She sank to her knees, conscious of the soreness which her horseback ride had left. She thought of her clumsy self in the dusty road as she gazed down at the graceful boys on the lawn and said, "Why, they're actually pretty. Too pretty." She was certain of one thing: She didn't want any of their snobbishness. She wouldn't have it from his two kids.

One boy's racket missed the feather thing. George shouted, "Game!" The group under the tree applauded, and the men pushed themselves up from their seats to come out into the sunlight and pat the naked backs of the boys.

When the boys came close together, Josie saw that one was six inches taller than the other. "Why, that one's grown!" she thought. The two of them walked toward the house, the taller one walking with the shorter's neck in the crook of his elbow. George called them: "You boys get dressed for lunch." He ordered them about just as he did her, but they went off smiling.

Josie walked in her bare feet into the little closetlike bathroom which adjoined her room. She looked at herself in the mirror there and said, "I've never dreaded anything so much in all my life before. You can't depend on what kids'll say." But were they kids? For all their prettiness, they were too big to be called kids. And nobody's as damn smutty as a smart-alecky shaver.

Josephine bathed in the little, square, maroon bathtub. There were maroon and white checkered tile steps built up around the tub, so that it gave the effect of being sunken. After her bath, she stood on the steps and powdered her whole soft body. Every garment which she put on was absolutely fresh. She went to her closet and took out her new white silk dress and slipped it over her head. She put on white shoes first, but, deciding she looked too much like a trained nurse, she changed to her tan pumps. Josie knew what young shavers thought about nurses.

She combed her yellow hair till it lay close to her head, and put on rouge and lipstick. Someone knocked at the bedroom door. "Yeah," she called. No answer came, so she went to the door and opened it. In the hall stood one of the boys. It was the little one.

He didn't look at her; he looked past her. And his eyes *were* as shiny and cold as those of a wax dummy!

"Miss Carlson, my dad says to tell you that lunch is ready. And I'm Buddy."

"Thanks." She didn't know what the hell else she should say. "Tell him, all right," she said. She stepped back into her room and shut the door.

Josie paced the room for several minutes. "He didn't so much as look at me." She was getting hot, and she went and put her face to the window. The people from Memphis had come indoors, and the sun shone on the brownish green grass and on the still trees. "It's a scorcher," she said. She walked the length of the room again and opened the door. Buddy was still there. Standing there in white, his shirt open at the collar, and his white pants, long pants. He was leaning against the banister.

"Ready?" he said, smiling.

As they went down the steps together, he said, "It's nice that you're here. We didn't know it till just a few minutes ago." He was a Yankee kid, lived with his mother somewhere, and rolled his *r*'s, and spoke as though there was a lot of meaning behind what he said. She gave him a quick glance to see what he meant by that last remark. He smiled, and this time looked right into her eyes.

After lunch, which Josie felt had been awful embarrassing, they traipsed into the back parlor, and George showed off the kids again. She had had a good look at the older one during lunch and could tell by the way the corners of his mouth drooped down that he was a surly one, unless maybe he was only trying to keep from looking so pretty. And all he said to the questions which George asked him about girls and his high school was, "Yeah," or, "Aw, naw." When Henry brought in the first round of drinks, and he took one, his daddy looked at him hard and said, "Jock?" And the boy looked his daddy square in the eye.

Buddy only shook his head and smiled when Henry offered him a drink, but he was the one that had started all the embarrassment for her at lunch. When they came into the dining room, he pulled her chair out, and she looked back at him—knowing how kids like to jerk chairs. Everybody laughed, but she kept on looking at him.

And then she knew that she blushed, for she thought how big her behind must look to him with her bent over like she was.

The other thing that was awful was the question that Mrs. Jackson, the smallest matron and the one with the gray streak in her hair, asked her: "And how do *you* feel this morning, Miss Carlson?" It was the fact that it was Jackson's wife which got her most. But then the fool woman said, "Like the rest of us?" And Josie supposed that she meant no meanness by her remark, but she had already blushed; and Jackson, across the table, looked into his plate. Had this old woman and George been messing around? she wondered. Probably Mrs. Jackson hadn't meant anything.

As they all lounged about the sitting room after lunch, she even felt that she was beginning to catch on to these people and that she was going to start a little pretense of her own and make a good thing out of old Georgie. It was funny the way her interest in him, any real painful interest, was sort of fading. "I've never had so much happen to me at one time," she said to herself. She sat on the floor beside George's chair and put her hand on the toe of his brown and white shoe.

Then George said, "Buddy, you've got to give us just one recitation." And Buddy's face turned as red as a traffic light. He was sitting on a footstool and looking down at his hands. Jock reached over and touched him on the shoulder and said:

"Come on, Buddy, the one about 'if love were like a rose.' " Buddy shook his head and kept his eyes on his hands.

Josie said to herself, "The kid's honestly timid." It gave her the shivers to see anybody so shy and ignorant of things. But then he began to say the poetry without looking up. It was something about a rose and a rose leaf, but nobody could hear him very good.

George said, "Louder! Louder!" The boy looked at him and said a verse about "sweet rain at noon." Next he stood up and moved his hands about as he spoke, and the blushing was all gone. He said the next one to Mrs. Roberts, and it began:

*If you were life, my darling,
And I, your love, were death . . .*

That verse ended with something silly about "fruitful breath." He went then to Billy Colton's wife, and the verse he said to her was

sad. The boy *did* have a way with him! His eyes were big and he could look sad and happy at the same time. "And I were page to joy," he said. He actually looked like one of the pages they have in stores at Christmas.

But now the kid was perfectly sure of himself, and he had acted timid at first. It was probably all a show. She could just hear him saying dirty "limricks." She realized that he was bound to say a verse to her if he knew that many, and she listened carefully to the one he said to Mrs. Jackson:

*If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May,
We'd throw with leaves for hours
And draw for days with flowers,
Till day like night were shady
And night were bright like day;
If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May.*

He turned on Josie in his grandest manner:

*If you were queen of pleasure,
And I were king of pain,
We'd hunt down love together,
Pluck out his flying-feather
And teach his feet a measure,
And find his mouth a rein;
If you were queen of pleasure,
And I were king of pain.*

And Josie sat up straight and gave the brat the hardest look she knew how. It was too plain. "Queen of pleasure" sounded just as bad as whore! Especially coming right after the verse about "April's lady." The boy blushed again when she glared at him. No one made a noise for a minute. Josie looked at George, and he smiled and began clapping his hands, and everybody clapped. Buddy bowed and ran from the room.

"He's good, George. He's good," Jackson said, squinting his beady little eyes. Jackson was really a puny looking little guy in the light of day! And he hadn't thought the boy was any better than

anybody else did. It was just that he wanted to be the first to say something.

"He's really very good," Mrs. Jackson said.

George laughed, "He's a regular little actor," he said. "Gets it from Beatrice, I guess." Everybody laughed.

George's wife was an actress, then! She'd probably been the worst of the whole lot. There was no telling what this child was really like.

"How old is he, Jock?" Jackson asked. How that man liked to hear his own voice!

"Fourteen and a half," Jock said. "Have you seen him draw?" He talked about his kid brother like he was his own child. Josie watched him. He was talking about Buddy's drawings, about the likenesses. She watched him, and then he saw her watching. He dropped his eyes to his hands as Buddy had done. But in a minute he looked up; and as the talking and drinking went on, he kept his eyes on Josephine.

It wasn't any of George's business. It wasn't any of his or anybody's how much she drank, and she knew very well that *he* didn't really give a damn! But it *was* smarter 'n hell of him to take her upstairs, because the boys had stared at her all afternoon and all through supper. That was really why she had kept on taking the drinks when she had made up her mind to let up. She had said, "You're jealous. You're jealous, George." And he had put his hand over her mouth, saying, "Careful, Josie." But she was sort of celebrating so much's happening to her, and she felt good, and she was plain infuriated when George kissed her and went back downstairs. "He was like his real self comin' up the steps," she said. He had told her that she didn't have the gumption God gave a crabapple.

Josie went off to sleep with her lips moving and awoke in the middle of the night with them moving again. She was feeling just prime and yet rotten at the same time. She had a headache and yet she had a happy feeling. She woke up saying, "Thank God for small favors." She had been dreaming about Jock. He was all right. She had dreamed that together she and Jock had watched a giant bear devouring a bull, and Jock had laughed. He was all right. She was practically sure. His eyes were like George's, and he was as stubborn.

It would have been perfectly plain to everybody if supper hadn't been such an all-round mess. What with Jackson's smutty jokes and his showing off (trying to get her to look at him), and Mrs. Colton's flirting with her husband (holding his hand on the table!), nobody but George paid any attention to Jock. And she was glad that she had smacked Jackson when he tried to carry her up the stair, for it made Jock smile his crooked smile.

"They all must be in bed," she thought. The house was so quiet that she could hear a screech owl, or something, down in the woods.

She thought she heard a noise in her bathroom. She lay still, and she was pretty sure she had heard it again. She supposed it was a mouse, but it might be something else; she had never before thought about where that door beside the bathtub might lead. There was only one place it could go. She got up and went in her stocking feet to the bathroom. She switched on the light and watched the knob. She glanced at herself in the mirror. Her new white silk dress was twisted and wrinkled. "Damn him," she whispered to herself. "He *could* have made me take off *this* dress." Then she thought she had seen the knob move, move as though someone had released it. She stood still, but there wasn't another sound that night.

In the morning when she turned off the bathroom light, she was still wondering. She looked out of the window; the high net was down. No one was in sight.

What they all did was to slip out on her before she woke up! And in the breakfast room that morning Amelia wanted to talk, but Josephine wasn't going to give the nigger the chance. There was no telling what they had let the niggers hear at breakfast. Amelia kept coming to the breakfast room door and asking if everything was all right, if Miss Josephine wanted this or wanted that, but Miss Josephine would only shake her head and say not a word after Amelia had once answered, "They've went back to Memphis." For all she knew, George and the kids had gone too. It would have been like him to leave her and send after her, just because he had promised her she could stay a week. (He talked like it was such a great treat for her. She hadn't given a copper about the place at first. It had been *him*.) But he'd damned well better not have left her. She'd got a taste of this sort of thing for its own sake now, and she'd stay for good!

Buddy opened the outside door of the breakfast room.

"Good morning, Miss Carlson," he said.

"Hello," Josie said. She did wonder what Jock had told Buddy, what he had guessed to tell him. Buddy wasn't at dinner last night, or she couldn't remember him there.

He was wearing khaki riding pants and a short-sleeved shirt. He sat down across the table from her. "I guess we're all that's left," he said. He picked up the sugar bowl and smiled as he examined it. The corners of his mouth turned up like in a picture kids draw on a black-board.

"Did Jock and George go to Memphis? Did they?"

"Jock did."

"He did?"

"Yes, he did. And Henry told me he didn't much want to go. I was off riding when they all got up this morning. Daddy wanted me to go, but I wasn't here." He smiled again, and Josie supposed he meant that he'd been hiding from them.

"Where's your dad?"

"He? Oh, he went to the village to see about some hams. What are you going to do now?"

Josie shrugged her shoulders and began to drink her coffee. Jock was gone! He might have just been scorning her with those looks all the time. She should have gotten that door open somehow and found out what was what. "Why didn't Jock want to go?" she asked Buddy.

"Our pleasant company, I suppose," he said. "Or yours."

She looked at him, and he laughed. She wondered could this brat be poking fun at her? "Queen of pleasure!" she said out loud, not meaning to at all.

"Did you like that poem?" he asked. It was certain that he wasn't timid when he was alone with somebody, not at least when alone with her.

"I don't know," she said. Then she looked at him. "I don't like the one you picked for me."

"That's not one of the best, is it?"

Neither of them spoke while Josie finished her coffee. She put in another spoonful of sugar before taking the last few swallows, and Buddy reddened when she motioned for him to give up the sugar bowl. Amelia came and removed the breakfast plate and the butter

plate. She returned for Josie's coffee cup, and, finding it not quite ready, she stood behind Buddy's chair and put her hands on his shoulders. The scar was right beside his cheek. Buddy smiled and beat the back of his head against her ribs playfully. Finally Josie put her cup down and said, "That's all."

She went upstairs to her room. Jock had tried to get in through her bathroom last night, or he had been so on her mind that her ears and eyes had made up the signs of it. Maybe Buddy had caught Jock trying to open the door and had told George. At any rate George had sent Jock away. If he sent him away, then Jock had definitely had notions. Josie smiled over that. She was sitting on the side of her little canopied bed, smoking a red-tipped cigarette. There was the noise of an automobile motor in the yard. George was back! Josie went to her dressing table and drank the last of her whisky.

She sat on the stool before her dressing table, with her eyes on the hall door. She listened to George's footsteps on the stair, and sat with her legs crossed, twitching the left foot which dangled. George came in and closed the door behind him.

"I've bought you a ticket on the night train, Josie. You're goin' back tonight."

So he wasn't such a stickler for his word, after all! Not in this case! He was sending her home. Well, what did he expect her to say? Did he think she would beg to stay on? She would clear out, and she wasn't the one beaten. George was beaten. One of his kids that he was so mortally fond of, one for sure had had notions. "Almost for sure." George opened the door and left Josie staring after him. In a few minutes she heard his horse gallop past the house and out onto the dirt road.

She folded her white dress carefully and laid it on the bottom of her traveling bag. She heard Buddy somewhere in the house, singing. She wrapped her white shoes in toilet paper and stuck them at the ends of the bag. Buddy seemed to be wandering through the house, singing. His voice was high like a woman's, never breaking as she sometimes thought it did in conversation. It came from one part of the house and then another. Josie stopped her packing. "There's no such thing," she said.

She went down the steps like a child, stopping both feet on each step, then stepping to the next. One hand was on her hip, the other she ran along the banister. She walked through the front parlor

with its bookcases and fancy chairs with the eagles worked in the needlepoint, and through the back parlor with the rocking chairs and the silly candlestand and the victrola. She stepped down into the breakfast room where the sunlight came through the blinds and put stripes on the brick wall. She went into the kitchen for the first time. Mammy, with a white dust cap on the back of her head, had already started supper. She stood by the big range, and Amelia sat in the corner peeling potatoes. Josie wasn't interested in the face of either. She went through the dark pantry and into the dining room. She looked through the windows there, but no one was in the yard. She went into the hall.

Buddy was near the top of the stairway which curved around the far end of the long hall, looking down at her. "Why don't you come up here?" He pronounced every word sharply and rolled his *r*'s. But his voice was flat, and his words seemed to remain in the hall for several minutes. His question seemed to float down from the ceiling, down through the air like a feather.

"How did he get up there without me hearing him?" Josie mumbled. She took the first two steps slowly, and Buddy hopped up to the top of the stair.

The door to the kids' room was open and Josie went in. Buddy shut the white paneled door and said, "Don't you think it's time you did something nice for me?"

Josie laughed, and she watched Buddy laugh. Queen of pleasure, indeed!

"I want to draw you," he said.

"Clothes and all, Bud . . . ?"

"No. That's not what I mean!"

Josie forced a smile, and she suddenly felt afraid and thought she was going to be sick again.

"That's not what I mean," she heard the kid say again, without blinking an eye, without blushing. "I didn't know you were that sort of nasty thing here. I didn't know you were a fancy woman. Go away. Go on out of here. Go on out of here!" he ordered her.

As Josie went down the steps she kept puckering her lips and nodding her head. She was trying to talk to herself about how many times she had been up and down the steps, but she could still see the smooth brown color of his face and his yellow hair, and she could also see her hand trembling on the banister. It seemed like five years

since she had come up the steps with the matrons from Memphis.

In the breakfast room she tore open the frail door to George's little liquor cabinet and took a quart of bourbon from the shelf. Then she stepped up into the hall and went into the sitting room and took the portable victrola and that record. As she stomped back into the hall, Buddy came running down the steps. He opened the front door and ran out across the veranda and across the lawn. His yellow hair was like a ball of gold in the sunlight as he went through the gate. But Josie went upstairs.

She locked her door and threw the big key across the room. She knocked the bottle of toilet water and the amber brush off her dressing table as she made room for the victrola. When she had started "Louisville Lady" playing she sat on the stool and began to wonder. "The kid's head was like a ball of gold, but I'm gonna think about him ever once I get back to Memphis," she told herself. "No, by damn, but I wonder just what George'll do to me." She broke the blue seal of the whisky with her fingernail, and it didn't seem like more than twenty minutes or half an hour before George was beating and kicking on the door, and she was sitting on the stool and listening and just waiting for him to break the door, and wondering what he'd do to her.

MEDIATORS TO THE GOATHERD

James Hinton

SUNSET, and the goatherd still lay watching from the bluff above Javali Pass. Even though he was in the heart of the largest mass of uncharted mountain and forest in South Mexico, and the nearest hamlet three days' ride at a kill-horse pace, the goatherd felt that he was slowly but inexorably being pushed into a corner by mysterious man, by man the unwanted, the dangerous.

He felt himself menaced more than he usually did when men came within his sight. And without the infallibly sensitive nostrils and the ferocious stranger-hostility of his dogs, he felt himself crippled, particularly now, when up through the open parklike forest, up the steep trail from the hotland, there came a tall lean man, bearded, with a rifle in his *left* hand and a black sarape hung from his *right* shoulder, and not moving openly in the middle of the trail, but stalking a little too much in line with the concealing pine trunks. He was at least five hundred yards away, but the goatherd knew him. He was an outlaw from the hotland, Sandoval, he lived in a lonely hut near Toro Muerto. His half-wild cattle roamed a mountainous forest domain long six days' ride, four days' wide, and when he could help it, Sandoval did not let others pasture in the domain of his cattle, least of all goats.

Though the sun was setting, the high-sierra air was still remarkably bright and clear; and so, of course, the goatherd thought of risking a shot. It was bound to cross his mind, for in the slow dangers every alternative crosses the mind of a wary man. And he was bound to think of it, for it was reasonable: first because at a distance Sandoval's repeating rifle had little advantage over his single-shot muzzle-loader; then because in a drawn-out sniping fight, his supe-

rior strength, swiftness, and marksmanship gave *him* the advantage; and last because at close range *Sandoval* would have an immense advantage in arms and stealth.

But it passed from his mind: he was a young man both pacific and cautious, and he was not yet certain that he would have to trade shots with *Sandoval*. Moreover, moving up to the pass from the other side, through the thicker bushier forest of the coastal slopes of the sierra, there came three men and five mules. One was a muleteer, a native of the coast. At almost a thousand yards the goatherd could tell that he was a *costeño*: his bolo was not in his belt but in a sheath hung from his shoulder, and his continually bowed head proved him a plainsman watching his clumsy feet on the steep rocky trail. The two riders were foreigners, for they wore boots and helmets, and even at a thousand yards the goatherd could see the brass stirrups, the arched little saddle bows without pommels, the flaps on the pistol holsters.

Sandoval would come first, perhaps to kill, perhaps to threaten again. Then the foreigners would come, they would undoubtedly stop at his camp, for it was dusk and the next spring lay far away. And the goatherd intuitively saw how he might use the strangers either to defend himself from the outlaw or to gain the outlaw's friendship: he had known no man who feared and hated strangers more than the outlaw from *Toro Muerto*.

The goats had scattered, and as he went swiftly down through the open grassy forest to his camp in the hollow of *Javali Pass*, he cracked his whip in a series of accelerating pistol shots, which made the strays trot into groups, and the groups race into a solid panic-stricken herd of five thousand snow-white goats, from which there rose a vast multitoned bleating.

He did not look at the huge jaguar skin that partially covered a cross carved into the trunk of the giant pine by the fire. He picked up the mangled dead dog and laid it in the distant clump of lupines beside the one that had died last night. Then he returned to couch himself by the fire, and kept flicking his new sarape until it covered his old muzzle-loader without appearing to cover anything. With his hand loosely about the pistol grip, and his index finger on the trigger, he waited for the outlaw. His inky black eyes and the hidden barrel both watched the same place, there where he most expected *Sandoval* to appear.

It was intensely cold, the patches of snow in the open forest were frozen hard. But pin points of sweat appeared on the goatherd's brow. The nostrils of his small finely shaped nose were white, and his whole face taut. He realized that he had waited too long.

He was crippled without the keen-scented nostrils of his dogs, and now Sandoval had turned his flank. Sandoval would know that he was conscisous of being watched, and he would keep him in suspense until he did something foolish—like risking a flying shot as he rolled rapidly over and over, with Sandoval pumping bullets into him from behind a tree. But the goatherd just lay still, pin points of sweat ice-cold on his hot skin: he knew that the outlanders were coming; besides, he had a certain fiber.

After Sandoval stopped moving, the goatherd could not see him at all, he had been only a scarcely perceptible movement at the corner of his right eye. The goatherd resisted. Finally Sandoval cleared his throat, a sound distinctly different from any of the many small noises made by the flocks—if one were minutely listening. Still the goatherd resisted, his sweaty fingers tight on the pistol grip.

Sandoval moved silently forward, in the corner of his eye the goatherd could see him, a dark stealthy motion.

"Well, goatherd, thanks to the jaguar, we meet quietly at close range." Slow deep-toned mocking voice.

The goatherd turned his head sharply, careful to keep the rest of his body absolutely still. He saw that the outlaw had put on his long black sarape, which just as effectively concealed the Winchester as his own concealed the muzzle-loader. "Yes," said the goatherd in an indifferent voice, "my dogs were killed. How goes it?" Lying still, he nevertheless gave the impression of utmost wariness; this he knew, but he could not help it.

Sandoval stood looking down at him from across the fire. Sometimes his eyes seemed languidly half-closed; sometimes they seemed dangerously narrowed. In the dusk, in the faint firelight, they were filled with a catlike expression of satiated superiority.

"Isn't it lucky we haven't our rifles?" he said. With voice and glance, with his whole being he luxuriously mocked the goatherd. "In sight," he added slyly.

"Ahh," said the goatherd, ignoring the last remark, "above all as my hands would be empty."

The outlaw mocked him with his soft throaty laughter. "Your

hands would be fuller than mine, goatherd—old muzzle-loaders have thicker pistol grips than new repeating rifles.”

In Sandoval’s eyes the goatherd saw the threat growing, closing, tightening about him. “Look,” he said, drawing his right hand, palm upward, from under the sarape. “Empty.”

Smiling slyly, the outlaw drew his rifle from under his long sarape. “Now the thing is for ending.”

“Then why didn’t you shoot me from the tree?”

“I wanted to divert myself with you,” said the outlaw. “This way I will feel more handsome when I kill you. My conscience, you know? Even though I told you clear if you came again I would shoot you.”

“Well, why don’t you?” said the goatherd seriously. He saw that this was exactly right, and he grew excited.

“Do you want me to kill you?”

“Not at all,” said the goatherd. “Do you?”

“Not a great much.”

“Well, don’t then . . . Sides to the rising and the sleeping of the sun you have pasture six days’ ride, below to the hotland two and a half, up to the divide here half, and . . .”

“A day’s ride, I told you clear,” said the outlaw, and the goatherd saw that he had made a mistake.

“That was at Toro Muerto, and I thought up here, half a day’s . . .”

“It would be a day’s ride if I had told you in Totolapan.”

Still worse, for now a malignant little line, a small horizontal wrinkle had appeared above the bridge of the outlaw’s nose, adding malignance and cruelty to the mocking face. The goatherd’s excitement passed into tense expectant fear. True, Sandoval still did not look mad, but the goatherd thought perhaps Sandoval killed without madness.

The outlaw’s eyes narrowed further—with an expression of acute listening. Then the goatherd listened too. Sandoval crossed the fire and stood behind the goatherd. The dusk had not deepened, it had brightened; and the mighty black spears of fir were tipped pale green-gold by the rising moon, and, almost touching the dark bluff above Javali Pass, a great sparkling star was contracting and expanding as if it were breathing and the flocks lay quiet now in the

half-darkness. From the south came the sound of hoofbeats muffled in grass and pine needles, low-toned, somber.

II

When the strangers were within fifty yards of the fire, Sandoval spoke casually, perhaps with a shade of contempt: "It may be some people are always found empty-handed."

The goatherd eagerly slipped his hand under the blanket, and once more placed his index finger delicately on the trigger. Sandoval, he thought with quiet satisfaction, fears an unknown voyager more than he fears a familiar enemy. He wanted to look at the outlaw's face, but he felt that it would be imprudent to turn.

"Hola, amigos!" shouted the foremost rider in a Spanish both heavily accented and deeply gutturalized. The bluff heartiness of the voice was not quite convincing.

"Pass," cried the goatherd in a gay friendly tone. "Pass, señores, come warm yourselves by your servitor's fire."

Sandoval glanced curiously at the goatherd, but he himself remained silent. As he watched the outlanders, the expression of mocking superiority returned to his half-closed eyes.

The foremost rider dismounted and came forward with his great fat legs swinging in that "out-of-door" style of walking used only by city dwellers. He bristled with animal health and merriment, both seeming acquired manners rather than integral characteristics.

"Two shepherds with their flocks . . . huntsmen as well, as I see by the big skin hung there, a whopper! Alone with our mother nature . . . I envy you, amigos, I envy you!" He took a deep breath, and sighed noisily as he smote his big pink hands together in a gesture of enormous satisfaction. "I say, Yutsa, isn't it an immense temptation to forget all one's ambitious plotting and planning, spend the rest of one's days in this beautiful forest?" he said to the small slender companion who had joined him by the fire. Without waiting for a reply, he addressed himself to Sandoval: "And now, my good friend, what about some milk for the thirsty voyagers? A jug of warm sweet foaming milk, and what does one want with the finest wines? Get out the utensils," he said as an afterthought to the muleteer, who stood with a rope in his hand,

staring defensively and with a great stupid embarrassment at the group by the fire.

"What!" cried the blond stranger with angry indignation when he saw the muleteer standing there so stupidly. "But what—what are you doing there? Do you expect the mules to unload themselves! Be about it now—flying, flying!"

"The mules . . . si, señor Steinman . . . the mules . . . there I go . . ." As the muleteer stared for another second at the blond alien, his stupid embarrassment increased unreasonably, and half-bewildered anger flickered across his blunt face. "There I go . . ." he mumbled rapidly as he began to fumble with the cargos. The goatherd was almost bound by tradition to help him. But his hands were skilled enough to untie hard knots and loosen the right ropes without looking, and as he helped the muleteer unload, he closely watched the three men. Yutsa had sat down by the fire, which was reflected in his glasses, giving him a solemn but remote and outlandish expression. Steinman had again requested the outlaw to milk the goats, but this time the request was said in a tone of good-natured command. The outlaw, leaning against the carved pine trunk, stared at the blond stranger with his eyes half-closed, and a languid mocking air to his face and the tilt of his head.

"If you would see . . ." he said in his slow mocking voice. He paused. "I don't know how."

"Don't know how!" echoed Steinman angrily. "Aren't you a goatherd?"

"I am not a goatherd," said Sandoval with a shade of contempt which was not lost upon the listening goatherd. "Are you?"

"Well what are you if not a goatherd," said Steinman belligerently.

"I am a man, sir, and you?"

The outlander clutched his pistol holster with a loud slap, a childishly dramatic gesture which he did not seem to realize nearly cost him his life. But Yutsa by the fire, and the goatherd unloading a little way off, they saw the muzzle of Sandoval's rifle as it moved up under his sarape and pointed at Steinman's chest.

"Señor Steinman, let me have the altitude please," said Yutsa in his ludicrously broad Spanish, which he spoke as if experiencing difficulty in closing his mouth. The blond outlander seemed to think better of continuing his argument with the outlaw. "Eleven thou-

sand seven hundred," he said. They began to talk in a strange gibbering tongue. "Weeshy, weeshy, weeshy, weesh," said Yutsa. "Bisgya, bisg, bisg, bisg," said Steinman.

Sandoval watched them from across the fire. There still remained between his eyes the little horizontal line which had appeared a moment ago; it gave him an expression full of malignant hatred.

"Who do you bring there?" whispered the goatherd to the muleteer.

"The little one is a Japanese, he looked for beetles all up and down the coast, and he climbs up the highest trees and stays there for hours waiting for the beetles with an instrument. The big one—some say he's American, others German, God may know. Some say they're making maps for an invasion, to protect us from the gringos you see, but what does it matter? They all come from the same country. I myself am from the coast, but finding myself very poor . . ."

"I knew you were from the coast a gunshot away," said the goatherd contemptuously. "The other rope—the *other* one, ox-foot! Now pull . . . pull, man! You pumpkin's head, you, how did you dare pass yourself off as a muleteer?"

"I did not, cousin, no!" whispered the muleteer, speaking rapidly and skipping his *d*'s and *s*'s. I came as mozo—being ground down, one has to hire oneself out. The second day out from the village the muleteer left us. He said they were making maps for an invasion and scolding night and day. I was going too, but Steinman said he would kill me, all day long he grinds me, he doesn't give me enough to eat . . ."

They had finished unloading, and the goatherd interrupted his tearful whispers with a savage "Shut up!" Thinking of the foreigners, he grew angry.

"Have you got the pans out?" demanded Steinman.

"Pans . . . ?" echoed the muleteer stupidly, scratching his jet black hair, which stood stiffly on end. It was obvious that his master inspired in him such a feeling of fear, of uselessness, that he could not understand a simple command in his master's presence.

"Pans! can you not hear? . . . Pans, pans, pans!" Steinman's voice rose to an unreasonable shout.

The muleteer's eyes perspired with embarrassment. His expres-

sion indicated that he was on the verge of weeping with despair and humiliation, but he turned obediently and began to fumble with the packs.

"Do us the favor, amigo," said the blond stranger then to the goatherd. "Sell us a little milk."

The goatherd's finely shaped face paled as he replied with a sinking feeling: "I do not milk the she-goats now. If I milk them, the kids lose their strength and die of the cold."

"My God!" ejaculated the blond. "I suppose next you'll tell me you have no goat meat!"

"That is true. He-goats I have not enough, nor any she-goats not big with young or already with kids. Recently I took out and sold a flock." Against his desire, his tact forced him to give explanations, and he saw that he was losing his opportunity to fortify his new-sprung fraternity with the outlaw.

"Lies!" exclaimed the big stranger. He rose to his feet and began to stride rapidly back and forth in front of the fire. "No milk, no meat . . . then on what do you live!" he shouted, stretching out his arms, and looking from one mountaineer to the other.

"Look," said the goatherd, and he made as if to demonstrate on what he lived. He threw his new sarape aside, swiftly picked up his old muzzle-loader, and curled his index finger about the trigger. "I shoot with my gun," he said.

"My God—you Mexicans are not fit to own this magnificent country!" cried Steinman, pretending that he had noticed neither the goatherd's threat nor his challenge. He tossed up his huge pink hands, and once more fell to striding back and forth in front of the fire.

"Hundreds of thousands of acres of splendid timber and pasture land, and yet you live houseless and nearly starve to death . . ." He grew eloquent, he poured over them great masses of contorted rhetoric, the more passionate he grew the more incomprehensible his oratory, until at last he was trying to smother them purely in his own harsh menacing gibberish.

The outlaw beckoned to the goatherd. "Look, pastor," he whispered, "I am going to leave you for a moment—a little task." The goatherd saw that the outlaw, whatever else he intended, was testing his courage. And he noted with deep satisfaction that the outlaw had called him "pastor."

"Or it might be that you would do the little task," added Sandoval.

"It might be," said the goatherd.

"Some mule herb. There's a patch of it where the madroño lies across the trail to Toro Muerto."

"But . . ." The goatherd was discountenanced, and he glanced away with a sullen frown. "They die with agony," he said.

"It would be convenient—for you," said Sandoval. Meaningfully, he turned his sly half-closed eyes toward the flocks. The moonlight was descending into the hollow, and already it struck some of the standing goats' white backs and the he-goats' horns. The flocks were beginning to graze again.

The goatherd was undecided, his finely shaped lips tight.

"To the friendship of one mountaineer what is the good will of three outlanders?" said the outlaw softly. The malignant little line had returned to the bridge of his nose, and it increased the value of his overture.

"Agreed," said the goatherd, and he walked casually past the mules, toward the trail. His walk slowly accelerated, and when he disappeared into the moonless forest at the foot of the eastern bluff, he had fallen into the swift light stride which the watching outlaw knew could easily outstrip any man in the sierra. "Those Indians," he murmured to himself with pleasure.

Sandoval saw how the two outlanders exchanged glances when the goatherd left. Speculative glances. The blond probably speculating upon the extent of the superiority he had gained over the lone mountaineer, the Japanese speculating no doubt upon the meaning of the goatherd's departure. The tall Mexican leaned silently against his tree. He had forgotten about the jaguar skin behind him, but he was secretly satisfied to be leaning against the cross carved into the trunk. His half-closed eyes might have been looking steadily at the tips of yellow flame over the fire; they might have been looking through the thin flames at the two outlanders.

For over an hour the two outlanders sat together, talking the strange gibberish; painstakingly, and with much consultation of a shiny round instrument, drawing wavering meandering lines on a piece of paper already marked out with little squares and many other lines. Then they discussed the paper for a long time, and finally Steinman inclined his head slightly toward the outlaw. "Gisb,

gisb, gisb, gisb," he said. "Weeshy, weesh," said the Japanese, and they were silent for some minutes. Casually then, Yutsa rose, pulled out a pack of cigarettes; he lit one, and, as an afterthought, offered one to Sandoval.

He noticed that the Japanese did not inhale the smoke, and he knew that for some time they had wanted to approach him. About what, he waited to see. He could feel that the immaculate little man before him was aware of being mocked, and that being mocked made not the slightest scratch on his pride.

"Cuestas de la Desgracia . . ." said the Japanese thoughtfully. "Why do they call them Hills of Misfortune?"

The outlaw was almost discountenanced. It was to Hills of Misfortune that the goatherd had gone, and they were called Hills of Misfortune precisely because of the poisonous herb that grew upon their slopes: nearly every year some unwary muleteer lost his whole caravan there.

Whether by some supernatural way of knowing things, or whether by supernatural keenness of hearing, he did not know; but for an instant Sandoval suspected that the strange little man before him knew where the goatherd had gone, and why. In the next instant, however, he realized that the Japanese was only leading on to another question. Still, he asked himself suspiciously, how would the Japanese know anything about the Hills of Misfortune, know even that they existed?

He languidly shrugged his shoulders. "Usually one knows only the reason for the names oneself gives to places," he said. "Like the pass here. Before the muleteers ever thought of crossing the sierra I used to shoot many javalis in this pass. So I called it Javali Pass, and that is what everyone calls it now."

The Japanese smiled, nodding his head and saying: "Que bonito! —how pretty!"

This was exactly right, and Sandoval was gratified; moreover, he was relieved to have successfully covered his flank. In his customary expression there was now, besides contempt for the physical aspects of Yutsa, what was an agreeable disposition toward him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the goatherd approaching, watched him steal toward the mules.

"What a poetic name! So full of hidden tales! And—where is the,

pass to these Hills of Misfortune?" asked the blond, with a coarse attempt at casualness.

Yutsa's glance fell. The outlaw languidly rolled his head, just as he might to indicate a direction, but actually indicating all points of the compass. As a matter of fact, the Misfortunes were too close to his hiding by Toro Muerto, and his suspicion increased. Steinman further spoiled the situation. "Well, amigo, you interest me, you know, you look like a pirate or a buccaneer of old. What do you do out here in the wilderness?"

Fortunately, Sandoval did not know the meaning of "pirate" or "buccaneer," but he understood the stranger's insincere clumsy overture. Steinman's lips parted over strong white teeth, the corners of his eyes crinkled; but the wide pale eyes did not smile. Sometimes he could see in them a certain mean imperiousness, but all in all they were far more strange and inscrutable than Yutsa's eyes. They were so pale and wide.

"If you would see . . ." he said slowly, then paused. "I hunt."

"And what do you hunt?" asked the Japanese.

"Deer, javali, . . . jaguar, puma, turkey. Sometimes I hunt my own cattle, they're just as wild as the deer."

"Your *own* cattle?" said Steinman. His tone was incredulous, affronted, and he could not keep contempt from it.

"Sometimes I hunt men," said the outlaw. Beyond the two outlanders, beyond the muleteer who was now taking his master's food from a wooden box, he saw the goatherd shaking the remnants of the herb out of his sarape. He also saw that Yutsa's eyes were turned slightly, upon his countenance an air perhaps of wary listening, perhaps of thoughtfulness. The little man took his glasses off, wiped them, then held them up, not directly in front of his face, but a little to one side. Sandoval wondered whether he could see the goatherd reflected in the glasses.

Steinman forced a laugh, though his cheeks flushed. "Come," he said with bluff superior familiarity, "be a good fellow, and tell us—is the pass into those hills wide and hollow like this? or . . ."

"With myself anywhere near, its shape is such that you will not enter it," said the outlaw. And the conversation died then in the reborn tension.

The outlanders fell to eating, only Yutsa remembering the stand-

ard courtesy of asking, "Is it not your pleasure to sup with us?" Steinman ate with an outward show of enormous appetite, but he continually hurled away scraps of food, and with ferocious exasperation complained of the fare. Yutsa ate meagerly, not looking at what he ate, and apparently unaware of the fact that he was eating. The muleteer reached furtively for his food, and Steinman watched closely every morsel that both he and the Japanese took.

"Why should I be eating this dirty stale canned meat when there are tons of fresh meat at my elbow!" said the big blond at last, flinging away a half-emptied tin. With the air of a man who would have his desires satisfied at any cost, he rose and faced the goatherd. "Now look here, goatherd, by fair means or foul, I am going to finish my supper with a nice fresh steak of goat. So, in the name of the hospitality for which you mountain people are famous throughout the world, I ask you to kill us a goat." Apparently he thought this little speech irresistible, for he finished with the smile of a man who knows that by sheer charm of personality he has persuaded another to do what he does not want to do.

The goatherd remained still, his arms crossed over his knees. He was looking not at Steinman but at the outlaw. It struck him that Sandoval was enjoying himself at the moment, enjoying himself exceedingly. The goatherd was silent.

"Say, didn't you hear me!" asked Steinman sharply, his pink cheeks growing brick red.

"If you would see . . ." said the outlaw. "No."

Steinman stood glaring at the goatherd, who stared up from under his brows at the outlander's waist. At the same time that the holster flap snapped, the goatherd cocked the giant hammer of his muzzle-loader. Apparently Yutsa had for some time past had his pistol on the ground beside him, and now he picked it up and rested it sidewise on his knee. He did not aim, and as he was gazing into the fire, his movement gave the impression of a casual absent-minded act.

At the goatherd's swift movement, Steinman half raised his hands, but for a moment the strife was in balance. Steinman's colorless eyes had become ferocious, and the little wrinkle between Sandoval's eyes had given to his face an expression of deadly malignance. The two mountaineers watched not Steinman but the Japanese.

Then Steinman continued the motion of his hands into an exasperated wave of his hands, and Yutsa said: "Let us go to bed."

III

The goatherd was roasting jerked venison over the fire. He paid no attention to the wide-awake outlanders. His cocked muzzle-loader lay beside him, but his only interest seemed to be in the roasting meat. Covertly, however, he sometimes glanced at the tethered mules. It was one of the fine saddle mules that was arching back and neck. It arched its neck as if it wanted to bite its chest.

Sandoval watched the outlanders. When the goatherd proffered him the stick, he took off the pieces impaled at the sharpened point, and he ate with his awkward right hand. The muleteer arose and came forward furtively, no doubt expecting the master to roughly bid him lie down. "Invite me, amigos. That whoreson doesn't give me enough to eat," he whispered.

The goatherd was going to let him pull some off the point of the stick, but Sandoval said: "No, give me the hot meat." He picked up the cold strips on the pine needles beside him, and he threw them at the feet of the muleteer. The muleteer's eyes watered with his stupid painful embarrassment as he stooped to pick it up. But when he squatted on his heels, he ravenously gulped down the half-chewed meat, and, just as a dog would, looked up at them for more.

The mountaineers ate meagerly. But after they were finished, the goatherd kept on roasting hard dark strips of venison. Sandoval plucked them off with his right hand and tossed them to the ground in front of the squatting muleteer, who snatched them up, stuffed them into his mouth, gulped them down, and looked up for more.

The goatherd no longer looked at the muleteer, but he could *feel* his stupid loathsome embarrassment. "Now go," he said.

The muleteer merely looked back with his eyes overflowing, and his embarrassment intensifying. "Enough, ox-foot!" said the goatherd irritably. "With this cold you'll die eating like that." The mules were now drawing in their necks as if unseen bridles were cruelly straining at their jaws. Thick vicious foam was growing on their muzzles.

A look of blind fear spread over the muleteer's blunt face. "Ahh, God!" he groaned. "The cold!"

"You'll wake up laughing with the cold," said the outlaw, mocking him with his queer low-toned laughter.

"Ahh!" groaned the muleteer fearfully.

One of the mules fell down and began a noisy struggle to rise. The goatherd's nostrils whitened, he sat staring with very tight lips at the fire.

"Now you'll catch it, now he'll *kill* you," murmured the outlaw to the startled muleteer. Probably Steinman thought that the mules were merely rolling about to scratch the sweat-caked hair on their backs, for he did not look up. Sandoval thought that perhaps the Japanese knew what was happening.

When one of the mules began to give forced panting grunts, Steinman suddenly sat up. "What have the mules got?" he said sharply to the horrified muleteer.

"Got . . . ? Yes, señor Steinman, the mules . . . there I go." He rose awkwardly, he walked clumsily over to the mules. "It looks as if they're ill," he said in a terrified voice, scratching his jet black hair which stood stiffly on end. Steinman hastily drew on his boots. Talking excited gibberish to the Japanese, he took his riding whip and went rapidly to the mules, his step curiously short, effeminate. When they did not rise but only lay panting, he shouted louder, he whipped their foaming muzzles, furiously kicked their distended bellies. Gesticulating, shouting furious gibberish, he walked back and forth between the beasts and the fire, questioning both the muleteer and the Japanese. He slapped the muleteer's face, shook his fist at the mountaineers, in a passionate voice thundered explosive menacing words. The flocks stared at him for a moment with their stupid shortsighted gazes, they gave popping sneezes followed at once by a deprecatory jerk of their heads, and then went on chewing with incredible rapidity.

Sandoval still leaned against his tree, the malignant little line once more between his eyes. The goatherd sat looking into the fire, resisting the tension, resisting with all his fiber the unbearable desire to leap up screaming and bury his teeth in the raving stranger's cheekbone. He was not watching Yutsa as he should have been. The Japanese was staring thoughtfully into space, but he seemed a little surprised.

"You *dog*—*you* will pay!" shouted Steinman at last in Spanish,* shaking his huge pink fist in the outlaw's face. For the first time

Sandoval uncovered his rifle, he dug the muzzle into Steinman's barrel-like middle, and then he lunged. Steinman ran and threw himself upon his sleeping bag, where he cried hysterically and beat the pillow with his two huge fists. Suddenly he was silent.

"Take my boots off," he said thickly to the muleteer. Sandoval moved his right hand to catch the muleteer's eye, and then he shook his head menacingly, raising the muzzle of his rifle. The muleteer stood as if paralyzed, his yellow face contorted with blind overpowering fear.

"Take my boots off!" screamed the blond giant turning over. The outlaw made a motion as if to extract from an invisible sheath hung from his shoulder an invisible bolo. The muleteer snatched his bolo out of the sheath.

"What do you want?" asked Steinman in the uncontrolled voice of a mad adolescent.

"Whatever *you* want," whispered the muleteer. He appeared to be on the verge of fainting.

Steinman leaped to his feet, drawing from his riding whip a needle-like two-foot blade. "I am a swordsman! . . . scientifically trained . . . !" he screamed as he feinted and lunged. The muleteer fell over backwards, and the blond giant stumbled over him. Then the muleteer sprang up and fled into the moonlit forest with the master galloping after him.

Soon he brought him back, one of his big pink hands squeezing the cowering blubbing muleteer by the scruff of the neck. After the muleteer had pulled his boots off, Steinman, as if speaking to a small child he had just whipped, said: "Now don't ever tell me 'whatever you want' again. And just for that, you drag the mules away, drag them to the bluff, else I'll beat you."

The moon was high overhead, and the flocks were restless. On moonlit nights they obliged the goatherd to stay awake, for the herd broke up into many straying handfuls, and when handfuls wandered too far, the jaguar became their herder. He would consolidate them by a series of hollow feline grunts uttered in crescendo, by sudden sharp whistles, but always with sounds not used within the last few minutes, with sounds that would fall upon them with uttermost surprise. Now the whole flock was drawing hesitantly toward the fire. The leader stopped, the whole flock stopped. Two bearded he-goats standing side by side rose up on their hind legs,

turned their heads as they came down so that their horns met with a shock as of two heavy stones smitten together. A few he-goats pushed through the front ranks and moved a few steps nearer, followed at once by the whole flock. Nearer and nearer they came with their shortsighted slightly cross-eyed inquisitive gazes, making a clicking sound with their hoofs as of a man cracking his knuckles. "Ugh!" cried the goatherd, as if he had been given a mighty blow on the stomach. They knocked each other down in their haste to flee, and as he continued crying, "Ugh! ugh! ugh!" they fell into a mad panic-stricken flight down the moonlit forest. In a minute the tightly knit flock was staring silently at him from the other side of the hollow.

Above the murmuring sound of the fire, he could hear the muleteer grunting and cursing as he tugged at the dead mules' tails. He wished he would stop his animal-like struggling and grunting. It irritated him more and more to think of the fool trying to drag the mules away, particularly as he went about it in such a senseless way; and he would have been glad to see the poor numbskull escape. He turned to look at Sandoval's tree, but the outlaw, whom he had not seen leave, had not yet returned. Taking several strips of jerked venison and a piece of jaguar meat, he walked lightly toward the muleteer, guardedly watching the figures lying by the fire.

"Here, pumpkin's head," he whispered contemptuously, thrusting the meat nearly into the muleteer's face. "Be going now. In the morning your master is going to saddle you with the three cargos and then whip you dead. As you go, chew this jaguar meat for your cowardice. At noon eat one strip of venison, at sundown another. Day after tomorrow, eat one for breakfast, one for dinner, one for supper. There's one for your breakfast the third day, and you'll sup in the village. Now be going before they stop you. By dawn you'll have half a day's start."

"Yes?" said the muleteer stupidly. "Yes . . . the jaguar meat for . . . one for each meal, you say?"

"Be going!" hissed the goatherd.

"I go," said the muleteer. For the first time since the goatherd had seen him, he spoke with the mind of a man. And he hurried up the slope, body ungracefully forward and head down, after the manner of plainsmen in the mountain.

The goats were again pressing about the camp, nibbling at the stranger's cargos. The goatherd tossed a glowing ember whirling through the air, and they swarmed off, their twenty thousand hoofs sounding like a hurricane sweeping through the grassy forest.

Sandoval did not return until the moon was about halfway between the zenith and the western horizon. He had been gone about six hours, and now, of a sudden, he was once more leaning against his tree. The goatherd noticed at once that he had two rifles, for the outlaw made no attempt to conceal them.

"Where is the *costeño*?"

The goatherd explained to him, and Sandoval was displeased.

"I wanted to give him your rifle," he said.

"Pretty soon I'll have to be asking you about the breath I draw," said the goatherd with sudden anger. His eyes did not waver, though Sandoval stared at him darkly.

"Pretty soon you may not have any breath to draw," whispered the outlaw.

The goatherd frowned impatiently. "What did you want to give him my rifle for?"

"So that he could ambush his master."

"And what would I do without my rifle?" asked the goatherd. He wanted that repeating rifle right away.

"Could you overtake him and return here by dawn?"

"The ox-foot's been gone only since midnight."

"You'll have to talk to him," said the outlaw as he handed the rifle to the goatherd.

The goatherd stole between the trees, his pace slowly increasing. Up the steepness he went swiftly, his body straight, head poised. It was the swiftest pace he had ever seen, and in the outlaw's sly half-smile there was something of pleasure. The queer part of him was that though he was a goatherd, he did not seem to lie. "The Indian," murmured Sandoval. He tossed an ember at the encroaching goats, and then he comforted himself against his tree.

There was no sign of dawn when the goatherd returned. His pace gradually slackened, and he stole slowly into the camp.

"Did you animate him?" asked Sandoval, who was eating venison.

"He was trembling with anger," whispered the goatherd. "Those aliens must have cast a spell over him, and the jaguar meat broke

the spell. You would not have known him. He was a man, trembling with a man's anger."

"It's good enough the rifle fires only one shot at a time," said Sandoval. "It should close the trail, and I don't want people crossing here any more. Those muleteers—talk, talk, talk. I've turned back three families this season."

"How?" whispered the goatherd, thinking of the closed trail.

"The Japanese will reach the coast, and he will talk. Then people will be afraid to come this way any more."

"The big one will be less afraid of us in the day," said the goatherd after a while.

When the strangers awoke, they seemed to take the muleteer's disappearance for granted, and they breakfasted without a single word. The mountaineers did not understand the silence, and their wariness increased. Steinman particularly made them overly suspicious.

The silence was not broken until the outlanders had finished their meal and made packs of their bedding and food. Then Yusta spoke. "Will you do us the favor of keeping our baggage for us meanwhile we send up a muleteer to pick it up?"

"If you would see . . ." slowly answered the outlaw. "No."

For an instant the eyes behind the lenses brightened dangerously.

Then they went off without a word, but with many a guarded look. The mountaineers watched them until they disappeared at the upper end of the pass. Then they followed, and watched the two booted figures vanishing into the coastal-slope forests below.

They returned to examine the cargo—more to see what the strangers had than to see what they might find profitable to themselves. "Those strangers . . ." said the goatherd calculatingly. "If one of them gets out alive, he will tell the other one's government, and then there will be an invasion. He said we were not fit to live here. It makes no difference who kills them, so long as they're killed a good way from here. But the thing is to kill none or kill both, true?"

They picked out blankets, clothes, cans; they picked out what pleased their fancy, without jealousy or quarreling. Most of the cargo was merely corn for the mules.

"I haven't eaten a grain of corn since the rains," said the goat-

herd. He heated some in an aluminum pan over the fire. When it began to turn inside out, he crunched it eagerly. Sandoval continued to look at him curiously, and then he too began to eat roasted corn grains.

"I'm weary of venison and turkey. Let's kill a young she-goat. We'll fill it full of boiled maize, then roast it."

"I'd like some goat meat," said the outlaw. He rose and stretched himself. "I'll be back by night, and so have it ready. Maybe I'll find some wild aguacates." He went off with his catlike step. He always moved as if he were stalking something. Usually he was.

The goatherd kept on eating corn. He was richly satisfied with himself until for some reason unknown he thought of a dark stealthy motion between the trees. As if a mouse had thrust its cold whiskered nose into his ear, an icy little tremor went down his spine. He went on eating corn, but his gaze had changed, as if he had been suddenly stricken with fever. He did not know whether he had seen the stealthy motion or whether he had remembered it from yesterday. Obliquely he glanced at his new rifle leaning against Sandoval's tree. It was gone.

The goatherd rose swiftly to consolidate the flock, to do his counting, and at the same time pick out a fat young she-goat. The thick white wheel of goats turned faster and faster, as he whirled the noose faster over his head. "Shepedi, shepedi, shepedi!" he cried. "Shepedi, shepedi, shepedi!" He was an Indian from Oaxaca with pin points of sweat ice-cold on his fine Zapotec face.

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